

The Brazilian New Consumers

*An analysis of personal perspectives on
changing consumption patterns within
low income families from Cabo Frio over
the last two decades*

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The Brazilian New Consumers: An analysis of personal perspectives on changing consumption patterns within low income families from Cabo Frio over the last two decades

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Abstract

The focus of this work is on the phenomena surrounding the increasing consumption that has been occurring among the poor in developing countries over the past decades. People who were confined to subsistence levels of consumption have started to change their consumption behaviours. This thesis aims to understand who the “new consumers” are, how they perceive life today after the changes in consumption patterns, what these changes are and which factors influence consumption and perceptions. Accordingly, I have found that people in fact perceive their lives in different ways after their consumption patterns have changed. The consumption of durable goods has considerably increased among the poor in Brazil, and the routine use of newly introduced appliances has brought novel practices, which have unfolded into new perspectives of life for its users, shaping as well the way they desire and consume. Moreover, aspects such as access to credit lines, social norms and media are influencing people to consume and behave in particular ways. I wrote this thesis grounded on Social Practice Theory, which I have employed to analyse the observations and statements collected during fieldwork in Cabo Frio, Brazil. Based on these data, I have built a case study to analyse how people perceive life after the alterations in consumption patterns and the introduction of new appliances in their routines. In order to comprehend the scenario in which the case study is based as well as the people it concerns, I included social phenomena, cultural background and public services as objects of my analysis.

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Acronyms¹

AC: Air conditioning

APAE: *Associação de Pais e Amigos dos Excepcionais* (Handicappers' Parents and Friends Association)

BCB: *Banco Central do Brasil* (Brazilian Central Bank)

BOP: Bottom of the Pyramid

BRL: Brazilian Real (currency)

CB: *Casas Bahia* (Brazilian retail chain)

CEEP: *Centro de Estatísticas, Estudos e Pesquisas* (Centre for Statistics, Studies and Research)

CEPERJ: *Fundação Centro Estadual de Estatísticas, Pesquisas e Formação de Servidores Públicos do Rio de Janeiro* (State Foundation and Centre for Statistics, Research and Training of Rio de Janeiro Functionaries)

CRAS: *Centro de Referência e Assistência Social* (Reference Centre for Social Assistance)

DPO: *Destacamento de Policiamento Ostensivo* (Police Department)

ECG: Electrocardiogram

FHC: Fernando Henrique Cardoso

Fies: *Fundo de Financiamento Estudantil* (Financial Aid Fund for Students)

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

HDI: Human Development Index

¹ I have translated the Brazilian acronyms which are written in Portuguese. Note that these are not official translations, but they may improve the readers' understanding.

IBGE: *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics)

INEP: *Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira* (National Institute for Education Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira)

Ipea: *Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada* (Institute of Applied Economic Research)

IPI: *Imposto sobre Produtos Industrializados* (Taxation over industrialized products)

ISP: *Instituto de Segurança Pública* (Public Security Institute)

MDS: *Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Combate à Fome* (Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Alleviation)

MEC: *Ministério da Educação* (Ministry of Education)

NGO: Non-governmental Organization

PMCF: *Prefeitura Municipal de Cabo Frio* (Cabo Frio Municipal Government)

PMERJ: *Polícia Militar do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro State Military Police)

PNAD: *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios* (Households' National Survey)

PPP: Purchasing power parity

ProUni: *Programa Universidade Para Todos* (Programme University for All)

PT: *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Labour Party)

R\$: Same as BRL, Brazilian reais (currency)

SAE: *Secretaria de Assuntos de Estratégicos* (Strategic Affairs Secretariat)

SAGI: *Secretaria de Avaliação e Gestão da Informação* (Secretariat for Evaluation and Management of Information)

SAT (United States): Scholastic Aptitude Test

SEPLAG: *Secretaria Estadual de Planejamento e Gestão* (Rio de Janeiro State Secretariat for Planning and Management)

SPT: Social Practice Theory

TCE: *Tribunal de Contas do Estado* (Rio de Janeiro State Court of Auditors)

UFMG: *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais* (Minas Gerais Federal University)

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

USD²: United States Dollar (currency)

UPA: *Unidade de Pronto Atendimento* (Emergency Room Unit)

UPP: *Unidade de Policia Pacificadora* (Pacifying Police Unit)

² To make the currencies generally intelligible in this study, I converted all the monetary values that were originally in Brazilian Reais (BRL) to United States dollars (USD). Therefore, I employed the currency exchange rate of 0.33 USD per BRL (or 3.00 BRL per USD), based on the May 11th, 2015 rates available from xe.com

1 Introduction

The rising level of consumption in developing countries is a relevant phenomenon on the subject of sustainable development. The demand for resources and energy is consistently growing while carbon emissions are rising exponentially, increasing the pressure on the planet. On the other hand, access to consumer goods may have the power to improve the quality of life of the poor in developing countries and even alter their wellbeing (Myers and Kent 2003, 4963).

People who were once confined to subsistence levels of consumption have started to change their consumption patterns and the present study aims to investigate this occurrence using a case study from Cabo Frio in Brazil. Typically, consumption studies focus on middle and upper classes and their established consumption patterns and habits. In contrast to this traditional approach, I am interested in exploring the practices of the poor, the “new consumers”, since there is a lot to be understood about their recently acquired habits and the effects over their everyday lives.

Hereafter, I present the ideas that ground my thesis, stating the problem and exposing the research questions it aims to answer. Furthermore, the historical perspective section introduces the early Brazilian political and economic circumstances, in order to aid in comprehending the context in which this study was developed.

1.1 Statement of the problem

It is widely agreed that the global replication of the current advanced economies' levels of consumption may lead to environmentally disastrous consequences. If consumers in emerging economies are included in the market by business-as-usual, the planet may be subjected to an even greater strain.

As argued by UNDP (2013), the world's current demand for resources is equivalent of two planet Earths, and developed countries are responsible for 90% of this demand. The same report (ibid.) reiterates that those indices illustrate how significant inequity is in today's world.

On the other hand, it may not be fair to deprive people in developing countries from the benefits of consumption because of the developed world's unsustainable demands. With that in mind, it is important to look at the ways of consumption that concern this specific segment of the population.

The low-income consumers are the “new consumers” and, despite their low economic power, they are numerous, they have credit lines and real need for products that can improve their wellbeing and comfort. Accordingly, companies are working to develop products and services shaped to that specific public and their actual necessities (Prahalad and Hart 1999).

To conduct this thesis, I was inspired by Harold Wilhite's work (2008, 2013 and 2014) about the consumption of electricity and electric appliances in developing countries. Given the recent alterations in the consumption patterns of the poor, I expected that interviewing low-income consumers would return interesting results regarding changing practices. I was correct in that sense and the fieldwork was a fruitful and delightful experience.

In Brazil, the low-income classes had their consumption boosted by the economic growth experienced in the country in the course of the last two decades. By now, the “new consumers” have already set their habits and routines of buying, using and interacting with acquired objects. The alterations in consumption patterns of low-income families in Brazil have affected their relations with consumption and purchased goods.

The aim of this research is to understand how people perceive their everyday lives after the changes provoked by the introduction of appliances in their households and, as a consequence, the insertion of new practices and habits into their routines. Narrowing further, I chose to focus on durable goods, which are mostly electric and electronics products. I believe that those goods can readily change one's everyday life, since several electric products have the capacity to save time and effort, whilst electronics may enhance access to information and change social interactions.

Despite the emphasis on appliances, my research does not disregard other goods such as vehicles. The use of public goods is also included in my analysis.

1.2 Research Questions

How do the new consumers perceive the alterations in their everyday lives given the changes that have occurred in the last two decades, with regard to the consumption of durable goods?

Secondary questions

How have the consumption patterns of the Brazilian “new consumers” changed during the last two decades at the household level?

In what ways have the recently introduced practices and habits changed the families’ everyday lives?

1.3 Historical perspective

In order to understand the context upon which the case study was drawn, it is imperative to take an overview of recent Brazilian history, especially over the last few decades and relating to the country’s political events.

From 1979 to 1994, Brazil tried 13 different monetary plans in order to stabilize its economy. By the year 1994, the Brazilian economic climate finally began to stabilize and the national GDP increased as a result of the successful *Plano Real*. Together with his finance minister Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) – who became president in 1995 and was re-elected in 1999 – the then president Itamar Franco implemented the Plano Real.

The Plano Real was the last monetary plan to be implemented in the country. It was designed to control inflation levels, currency price volatility and to stabilize the Brazilian economy after decades of economic crises during and after the dictatorial governments (Bresser-Pereira 1994, 129).

Both Presidents Itamar Franco and FHC spent about a decade implementing and stabilizing the *Plano Real*. As cited by Singer (cited in Braathen and Kasahara 2015), the economic stability was followed by rising prices of agricultural and mining

commodities in the global market, due to huge Chinese demand in the 2000's. This conjunctural fact helped to leverage the Brazilian economy.

Consistent with philosopher Roberto Romano's (2013) statements, the previous governments' efforts towards economic stabilization made it possible for the superseding president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to implement social programmes in order to alleviate poverty, such as the *Programa Bolsa Família*. The programme targets Brazilian families that are deemed poor or extremely poor. The central purpose of the programme is to break the poverty cycle, helping to decrease the country's inequity levels in medium and long term (Cedeplar /UFMG, SAGI, and MDS 2007, 3).

Overall, Lula's economic plan focused on boosting purchasing power and intensifying consumption. Its main objectives were to improve the internal economy and increase employment rates whilst enhancing the wellbeing of the poor (Braathen and Kasahara 2015). After two decades and a number of socio-economic events, consumption habits changed in Brazil and the poorest inhabitants were included in the consumers' logics. In line with this, the new social classification proposed by the government states that the former poor are now the "new middle class".

As stressed by Joseh Silva (2014) in his online article to the magazine *Carta Capital*, the traditional media in Brazil is incorporating the recent development of the so called "new middle class" in their programmes and soap operas. The media depicts purchasing power and growing consumption, showing how incredible it is that poor families now can buy white goods and big TV sets, and even glamorizes the life in the *favelas*.

However, as stated by Silva, "Despite the official discourse, it is unhealthy to smell sewage, to reside in risk areas, to live together with rats and to spend three hours to get to the sub-employment"³.

Silva argues that calling the poor the "new middle class" is a "fantastic fallacy". In his opinion, if one observes carefully, people from this segment of the population are being stripped of basic civil rights and infrastructure, whilst the access to consumer goods can be interpreted as social alms to keep the social picture as it has always been, ensuring

³ Statement translated from Portuguese.

the maintenance of the dependence relations that build Brazilian society and politics (ibid.).

In fact, concerning the numerous social changes promoted by the Labour Party's (PT) social programmes, the increase in consumption rates was curiously the most emphasized by newspapers and the general media. It is disquieting to realize that high levels of consumption are being highlighted as a way (or as the only way) to achieve better life conditions. Good examples of it were Lula's frequent speeches, bragging about the high levels of car sales in the country during his mandate, despite the poor Brazilian road infrastructure and the countless kilometres of traffic ques in mostly every Brazilian city.

Highlighting Silva's statements, the main demand of the 2012 demonstrations in the country was the improvement of basic public services. The demonstrators claimed that the high amount of taxes paid by the population should be justified with better infrastructure, high quality social services and efficient public institutions (Whitaker 2014).

Despite the apparent dissatisfaction of the population with PT's government, Dilma Rousseff was re-elected in October 2014, proving that the actual platform is somehow more promising to the people than the one presented by Aécio Neves, the right wing candidate. Dilma had 51.64% of the valid votes while Aécio had 48.36% (Eleições 2014). Although the difference in votes between the two candidates was about 3% – 3,459,963 votes in absolute numbers – the elections' result exposed a new political reality in the country: the division between North and South.

Considering the results of the elections in the Brazilian States individually, it is possible to observe the preferences of each region. The economically developed South, Southeast and Centre-west regions voted mostly for Aécio, whilst the poorer North and Northeast regions chose Dilma as their representative (ibid.). The given scenario has been analysed purely with economic lenses, as a demonstration of the willingness of the poor to maintain the social benefits acquired during the last 12 years of PT's government, while the votes of the southern population are an expression of their wish for a more open and liberal economy (Economist 2014b).

In my opinion, this is a reductionist analysis made by the cited source and other media channels in order to give a fast explanation to a complex phenomenon. A broad and correct analysis should also consider historical and cultural perspectives of both poles to understand properly the situation.

Nonetheless, the presented circumstances pose a great challenge to be considered by the new leading government, which will have to toil with a divided country, trying to please both parts while governing in a bleak economic period. The first market report of the year released by the Brazilian Central Bank (BCB 2014), published a day after Dilma Rousseff assumed her second mandate on the 1st of January, points out that the growth estimates for Brazilian GDP in 2015 is even lower than expected. Additionally, the values of the United States Dollar (USD) currency may increase (when compared to the BRL – Brazilian Real) and the projected inflation may rise.

1.4 Thesis outline

The ideas presented in this thesis are divided into seven chapters. In the first chapter, I have introduced my topic, stated the problem and exposed the research questions I intend to answer. Additionally, this chapter brings a historical perspective section that aims to create a background for the reader to understand the Brazilian scenario, explaining the recent political and economic facts and situating the further presented case study in time and conjuncture. The background continues to be delineated in Chapter 2, where I build a description of the field based on my own fieldwork and secondary data. Moreover, I describe my fieldwork research, the processes of data collection, data analyses and the methods I have employed to this study. Chapter 3 is where I present the Social Practice Theory, justifying why it is pertinent to be engaged in the study of consumption and thus, why I have selected it as my theoretical framework. I also present additional concepts I found relevant to employ in my work. Chapter 4 introduces the case study drawn in Cabo Frio. There, I expose the alterations in consumption patterns in Brazil and in Cabo Frio over the last two decades; this is followed by a depiction of my informants' profiles. To finish, I analyse some of the aspects affecting my informants' consumption practices, explaining how intrinsic values, the media, the government and retail chains operate to influence consumption. Chapter 5 is a continuation of my case study, and reveals the most interesting findings

concerning my informants' perception over the alterations in consumption of private goods, practices and habits. In Chapter 6, I approach consumption through the optics of public goods, presenting my informants' perceptions of the public services offered in Cabo Frio. Finally, in Chapter 7, I present the conclusions of this study.

2 Fieldwork and methods

This chapter aims to clarify the methodological choices I made in approaching my research questions. Henceforth, I describe the field in which I have conducted the research, based on my impressions and on secondary data. Additionally, I present the research methodologies employed in this thesis as well as the processes of data collection and data analysis. The descriptions are accompanied by an explanation of why I have decided to conduct this study the way I did and not differently, grounding my arguments for the peculiarities and limitations of the chosen topic and its background.

2.1 Study site

The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in Cabo Frio, a municipality in the State of Rio de Janeiro. With 186.227 inhabitants registered in the last Census in 2010 (IBGE 2014b) and 204.486 inhabitants estimated in 2014 according to the same source, the town is the reference centre of its region, *Região das Baixadas Litorâneas* (coastal plains region). It is located 155km north of the State capital and is famous for its history – Cabo Frio is the seventh oldest municipality in Brazil, and was one of the first strategic trading posts settled by Portugal in the country – and natural attractions such as its white sand beaches and numerous islands (PMCF 2014).

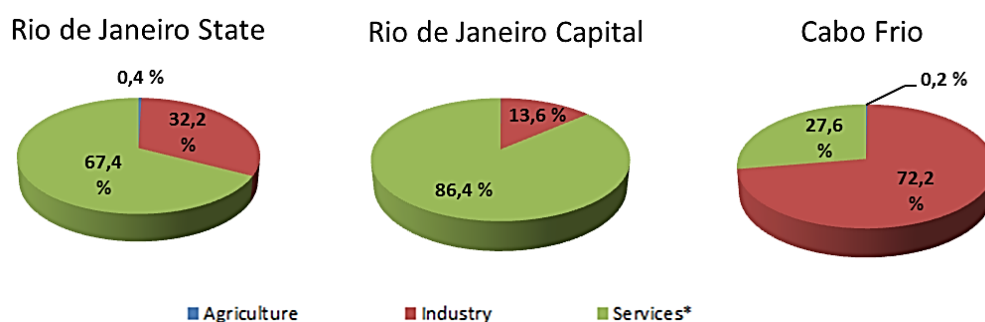


Figure 1: Representation of economic activities in the gross added value of the State, the State capital and Cabo Frio in 2012 (%) *Public administration is included in “services”. Source: SEPLAG, CEPERJ, and CEEP (2014c)

As one can observe in Figure 1, the industrial sector’s activities are the most relevant source of revenues in Cabo Frio. In comparison to the State and the State capital, whose economies are based on services, Cabo Frio’s financial profile is quite dissonant.

Despite a natural aptitude for tourism and the considerable number of business related to it, in 2012 the oil and gas industry comprised the most important economic activities in Cabo Frio, according to a State Government analytical report (SEPLAG, CEPERJ, and CEEP 2014a, 12). Since 2000, Cabo Frio has received revenues resulting from oil and gas exploration royalties⁴ (TCE 2004, 88) and became economically dependent on these levies. In 2010, the oil royalties alone were responsible for 37,4% of the town's total revenues, while tax revenues generated by local business were responsible for only 12,4% (TCE 2011, 73).

There is a permanent discussion about the oil revenues' situation in the Campos Basin⁵ region, since every municipality there is economically dependent on the oil royalties in spite of its original purpose. The revenues are compensation for the resource losses and, in theory, should be invested in infrastructure, social services and other activities to sustain the towns when the oil prospecting is over. Furthermore, investments should be made to enhance the capability of the municipalities to host services and offer adequate structures to the oil industry, e.g. roads, oil ducts, airports, ports and hotels (Postali and Nishijima 2011, 468-471).

The royalty's revenues are reflected in Cabo Frio's GDP per capita (see Table 1). The numbers show how uneven the town's economic profile is in comparison to the rest of the State and the country. Whilst the GDP per capita in Cabo Frio is 21.100,25 USD, it should be observed that the average monthly wage in the town is only 247,50 USD (3,465 USD per year) for those aged over 16 years with formal and informal occupations (IBGE 2014b). Yet, the Gini index⁶ reveals that the municipality is ahead in terms of income equality.

⁴ "Royalties are the main form of government participation (in the oil business profits) and represent a 10% tax on the gross amount of the monthly oil production. The funds raised are split between the states' and municipalities' producers (as well as to those suffering the impacts of production), the National Treasury, the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Navy" (Postali and Nishijima 2011, 464) *Statement translated from Portuguese.

⁵ The Campos Basin is located in the South-eastern continental margin of Brazil and is the most important oil province in the country (Teixeira 2012). *Statement translated from Portuguese.

⁶ "Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption expenditure among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution (...) a Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality" (World Bank 2014).

From the perspective of the social indicators, one can observe that the town's HDI⁷ is below the other compared ratings, even after longer than a decade receiving royalties. This data may indicate that, despite the money injections in Cabo Frio, there is still a lack of social investments, and the local government could better prioritize the application of that revenue.

Table 1: Cabo Frio general data compared with the State capital, Rio de Janeiro State and Brazil.
Source: IBGE (2014b)

	Cabo Frio	Rio de Janeiro Capital	Rio de Janeiro State	Brazil ⁸
Area (km ²)	410,418	1.197,463	43.777,954	8.515.767,049
Inhabitants	186.227	6.320.446	15.989.929	190.755.799
Population density (Inh/km ²)	453,75	5.265,81	328,03	22,43
HDI	0,735	0,799	0,761	0,744 ⁹
Gini index (2003)	0,44	0,48	0,5	0,545 ¹⁰
GDP per capita 2012 (USD)	21.100,25	11.408,73	10.251,45 ¹¹	7.274,52

From my personal experience, I would say that inequality is visible in Cabo Frio, as it is in several Brazilian cities. It is not rare to see people begging and working in informal occupations such as looking after cars in parking lots, washing car windows when drivers stop at a traffic light or collecting cans at the beach and around parties and festivals. Moreover, favelas can easily be spotted all around the city, especially in the peripheral regions. Along with the 2010 Census (IBGE 2014b) there are 12.303

⁷ “The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living.” (UNDP 2014a)

⁸ Data extracted from database Brasil em Síntese (IBGE 2014a)

⁹ Data extracted from UNDP official website (2014b), reference year 2013

¹⁰ Last data available from 2007: 0,52

¹¹ Data extracted from SEPLAG, CEPERJ, and CEEP (2014b, 4)

households contained by precarious settlements¹² in the town, accounting for 20,7% of 59.525 total households.



Figure 2: Neighbourhood in Cabo Frio after investments in infrastructure: paved and illuminated streets. Pictures: Marcela Oliveira Svoren

It is true that, in the most recent years, the local government invested in urban infrastructure at peripheral localities – such as *Jardim Caiçara*, pictured on Figure 2 – turning *favelas* into neighbourhoods. Schools, hospitals and parks were built and renewed, roads were paved all over the city, sidewalks fixed and painted, the touristic spots gained better structure and the events calendar became intense and expensive – the numerous music festivals through the year are all free and the city government covers their costs.

Conversely, the residents evaluate the investments as assistencialism – deeds of a government that is interested only in short term popularity and having its candidates elected on the next round of elections. Despite being essential, infrastructure such as sewage treatment plants, waste management and recycling facilities lacks investment, perhaps because it is invisible and will not result in votes.

2.2 My role as a researcher

To read and to reread means to understand, to interpret. One reads with the eyes one has. And [one] interprets from where one's feet are. Every point of view is

¹² “A precarious settlement (*aglomerados subnormais*) is a set consisting of at least 51 poor household units (shanties, houses etc.), lacking mostly essential public services, occupying or having recently occupied other's land property (public or private) and generally being arranged in a disorderly and dense manner” (IBGE 2011, 2)

*Statement translated from Portuguese. In Brazil, they are popularly known as *favelas*.

the view of a point. To understand how one reads, it is necessary to know one's eyes and what is one's worldview. This makes reading always a rereading (Boff 1997, 9)¹³.

As beautifully described by the Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff above, it is necessary to understand one's background in order to consider one's analysis of a given subject. Hereby I briefly present aspects of myself that may have influenced my research, from the data collection to the analysis.

The first relevant point I want to present here is that I was raised in Cabo Frio. I moved there when I was three years old and left the town at the age of 18 to go to college in the State capital, Rio de Janeiro, where I lived for ten years before I came to Norway. The fact that I was raised in Cabo Frio but have spent considerable time away from Brazil, has most likely allowed me to recognize clearly issues that were formerly invisible to me, such as the intrinsic values related to gender issues and humbleness, further explained in my case study. The experience of a new culture and lifestyle in Norway and the distance from my origins changed the way I looked at the field in a manner I could never imagine.

As well, the background I have acquired by growing up in such an environment could not have been attained through studying. To be a Brazilian, to know the local culture and to be a native Portuguese speaker definitely helped me to conduct my interviews and to capture the minutiae in the collected material. Moreover, my previous work experience, having done several fieldwork projects in poor communities in Rio and other Brazilian municipalities for three years gave me confidence and facilitated my work when conducting the interviews.

Nevertheless, some aspects of my persona will have influenced the results I collected, and this should be taken into account when one reads the analysis here exposed. I am a white (according to Brazilian standards), upper class, highly educated woman who studies abroad. Whilst not a foreigner, I am still not a part of my informants' world. My profile could have created a distance between my informants and me. To avoid that distance, I tried to adapt my language to my informants', making the interviews sound like an informal conversation. Besides, I established common ground by telling them I

¹³ Statement translated from Portuguese.

was also from Cabo Frio and showed recognition of places and situations mentioned in our talks.

Although the effect of my gender is immeasurable with regard to the answers I received in the interviews conducted, it should be acknowledged that this fact may have influenced the answers and behaviours of my informants – for more on gender issues in the Brazilian context, see subsection 4.3.1.

Furthermore, being raised in Cabo Frio might have affected my perceptions of the field and limited my curiosity about the city and its nuances. I may have taken things for granted when I could have explored said things in greater depth, or for a deeper understanding of my informants' points of view, instead of aligning them with previously formed concepts.

I believe that my previous experiences in the city ten years ago and the perceptions I gained throughout the fieldwork in September 2014 allowed me to draw an overview of the changes that have occurred in the city over the last two decades and grounded my analysis. I was able to comprehend how new life standards differ from the ones of the past, and to notice a series of minor but relevant cultural aspects, its influences on peoples' everyday lives, and subsequently in the acquisition and use of products.

2.3 Data collection

Given the importance of understanding the subjectivities of social phenomena in order to answer the research questions previously presented, I chose to collect part of the data that centre this thesis through fieldwork.

Fieldwork's stress on take-for-granted social routines, informal knowledge, and embodied practices can yield understanding that cannot be obtained either through standardized social science research methods (e.g. surveys) or through decontextualized reading of cultural products (e.g. text based criticism). Fieldwork reveals that a self-conscious shifting of social and geographical location can be an extraordinary valuable methodology for understanding social and cultural life, both through the discovery of phenomena that would otherwise remain invisible and through the acquisition of new perspectives on things we thought we already understood (Gupta and Feguson cited in Scheyvens and Storey 2010, 7).

To ground my case study, I have conducted a series of interviews with people comprising the “new consumers” in Cabo Frio area. The aim of the interviews was to collect information about my informants’ perceptions of their everyday lives after the changes in consumption patterns within the last two decades. I have also asked my informants about their perceptions of public services (or public goods).

I interviewed 13 people – comprising of two men and eleven women from different age groups. All my informants had families, and were each responsible for a household. I contacted my informants through my personal network such as friends and family. In addition, I also approached people working in small businesses in commercial buildings as well as service-related industries such as beauty salons around the city to support my academic work.

I interviewed five people in their workplaces, including two housemaids, one manicurist and two doorkeepers. Julia was interviewed at her household, from where she also works as a seamstress. The two sisters Eduarda and Elana were interviewed as well at their household. To understand why I chose this approach, please read section 2.6.

Furthermore, a friend who works for a non-profit organization knew about my research and invited me to seek informants at their waiting room. The organization APAE¹⁴ (Handicappers’ Parents and Friends Association) offers special treatments and a social environment to handicapped children and their families. As mentioned by the director of APAE Cabo Frio, the treatments are free and various poor families benefit from the institution.

At a spared room at APAE, I interviewed a few mothers while their children were receiving treatment. Additionally, I met a social worker from the local CRAS¹⁵ (Reference centre for social assistance) and was invited to visit his office. There, I interviewed one more individual prior to returning to Oslo.

I used an interview guide during the interviews in order to ensure I would not miss any relevant points, although trying to make the conversation flow as freely as possible. The

¹⁴ APAE is an independent institution that is financially supported by the civil society, public funds and local companies.

¹⁵ CRAS are the centres where people in need go to register for social programmes and well fare benefits – an equivalent to the NAV centres in Norway.

idea was to make my informants feel comfortable, allowing me to capture their perceptions and the subjectivities in our talks. My approach was mostly informal, and I did introductory conversations about my topic before starting the interviews. In my introductions, I emphasised the neutrality of my study and sought to clarify any biases regarding governments or private companies, underlining my academic purposes.

The material employed during the interviews was a sheet with the guide and a mobile phone, which I used such as an audio recorder and as camera. I was not able to take notes during the interviews, since my right arm was broken – I am a right hand writer – and I was wearing a cast during the time I was in the field. Given that unexpected situation, the audio recorder was the most important equipment I had to collect data in the field, and to record the interviews was not only important, but also mandatory in my case.

At the interviews, I introduced my study and then asked for my informants' permission to record. After they had agreed, I started recording and asked for their permission again, thus it would be registered in the audio material. I had no problems getting authorizations to record the interviews. I believe this happened partly because my informants could see that their permission was necessary to make the data collection possible, but also because I explained and clarified the work I was doing in our introductory conversations.

To help me with remembering the interviews and the people I talked to, I took pictures of some of my informants who authorized me to do so, though some of them did not feel comfortable enough to have their pictures taken. Additionally, I took pictures of places around the city, which I used to illustrate the infrastructural matters of Cabo Frio.

At home, I used a computer to take notes on the most remarkable moments of the day, my perceptions about the places I visited and the interactions I had with my informants. As a daily routine, I backed up the audio files and the pictures I took, cataloguing all the material by interview, to ensure nothing would be lost or forgotten. I used the diary written in the field to remember details while writing the case study.

Furthermore, I used the time I was not conducting interviews to analyse the local media, newspapers, magazines, television programmes and advertisements, searching for

material that could be relevant to grasp the consumption phenomena concerning durable goods and low-income consumers.

2.4 Data analysis and interpretation

I made use of the Social Practice Theory to help me with interpreting the data collected during the fieldwork and to approach my analysis within an academic framework. The theory is a complex one; however, it proved to be versatile and valuable in helping to approach the subject, using it as a set of useful tools that I could employ to understand in detail the presented social phenomena surrounding my study.

To enrich my analysis and build an understanding about the setting where I have collected peoples' statements and perceptions, I employed several types of secondary data combined with my findings. The secondary data allowed me to verify my interpretations of primary data as well as to enhance my analysis with additional facts.

What is more, the combination of primary data with secondary data coming both from Brazilian and from international sources facilitated illustrating my points. I made use of several resources to present my investigations: graphs and tables exhibit quantitative data; pictures taken in the field show the city's infrastructure; political illustrations, Brazilian literature and even a song lyric supported the description of social and cultural subjective elements.

Moreover, a background comprising historical facts and cultural aspects was included to clarify the scenario upon which this case was built to a reader that is not acquainted with the Brazilian context.

2.5 Case study research

To answer the research questions, I chose to analyse the subject through a case study. The case study was built upon information obtained in the field throughout qualitative methods. Furthermore, the primary data was combined with secondary data attained from diverse sources. As defined by Bryman and Burgess (cited in Scheyvens and Storey 2010, 57):

Qualitative research is characterised by three commitments. First it seeks to understand the world through interacting with, empathising with and interpreting the actions and perceptions of its actors. Qualitative methods are used to explore the meanings of people's worlds – the myriad personal impacts of impersonal social structures, and the nature and causes of individual behaviour. Second, qualitative research tends to collect data in natural settings, rather than artificial and constructed contexts (such as laboratories). Third, it tends to generate theory rather than test it. Qualitative methods work inductively, building up theory from observations, rather than deductively, testing theories by trying to refute their propositions.

It was imperative to adopt qualitative methods to analyse the subjective aspects regarding people and the consumption, interaction and perceptions surrounding their acquired appliances. Notwithstanding the using of quantitative secondary data on the building and enrichment of analysis, the subjective perceptions of my interviews are the key point scrutinized in this study, which explains why a qualitative approach was then mainly adopted.

According to Robert K. Yin (2009, 18), a case study methodology may be employed when one wants “to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding encompassed important contextual conditions”, in particular when “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident.” Additionally, Yin (Ibid.) exposes his concept:

The case study inquiry

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis

I decided to approach my research questions as a case study given my interest in understanding how a particular segment of the population within a specific geographic, political and social context thinks and behaves today regarding consumption. My concern is to comprehend how people were influenced over the years by the shifts in the context and how the alterations affect their everyday lives.

Meeting Yin's definition, my object of study is too complex and cannot be detached from its context. Hence, I decided to employ a triangulation, since I found it insufficient to draw the analysis based on secondary data or the fieldwork records alone. The subjective characteristics of a qualitative research can be problematic and may lead the reader to misunderstandings. As stated by Stake (1995, 45), to avoid that matter, the researcher should approach the subject with strong methodologies and concerning validation. Stake (*ibid.*) suggests the employment of a triangulation routine.

Alan Bryman (2008, 700) defines triangulation as "the use of more than one method or source of data in the study of a social phenomenon so that findings may be cross-checked." In this thesis, I have applied triangulation by using data collected in the field through open interviews and observation, crossed with analysis of secondary data such as articles and statistics. As a result, my findings are set within a broader context that helps to interpret the changes accounted for by my informants.

2.6 Limitations of the study

Two days before going to the field and starting the observations and interviews as planned, I had an accident and broke my right arm. Because of the impossibility of writing and driving, I had to rethink my original approach, which was to conduct interviews at my informants' households.

Given the unforeseen situation, I decided to adapt my approach to my limitations. I realized that going to people's working places could be a solution to fulfil with my fieldwork duties, as several commercial buildings and small business are located around the city centre, within walking distance from the place I was living. My new plan proved to be efficient, and I interviewed some people using this approach.

I also relied on my relatives to drive me to some places of interest, such as the APAE, the CRAS office and to some households. Although I got help from my family a few times, this was not an asset I could constantly depend on as my relatives were busy on their own.

Other limitations presented in the field were security issues. The areas which I originally planned to visit were targets of several police incursions as a result of

gunfights between rival drug dealers' factions (Cristiane 2014). As a consequence of the conflicts, the bus services were halted in some neighbourhoods and the road traffic had been diverted from the area in order to avoid incidents, as reported by the media (G1 2014). The security issues in Cabo Frio are better explored in subsection 6.1.4.

As a final point, it is important to observe that the analysis and conclusions of this study should not be used to generalize consumption phenomena in Brazil, consumption patterns among the poor or other related subjects. Brazil is a big and diverse country, with different economic, cultural and social contexts that influence every aspect here described and analysed. Furthermore, a single case study does not provide enough coverage to justify a theory (Lijphart cited in Moses and Knutsen 2012, 140).

However, according to Stake (1995, 85) people learn much that is general from single cases and it is unavoidable to make comparisons to other cases when one reads a case study (ibid., 134), and so it is for the researcher in the process of writing his/her own case.

2.7 Ethical dilemmas

Considering the studied segment of the population, some ethical dilemmas were presented to me in the field and are described in my analysis.

Some of the values inherent to Brazilians that I know well from being one were more apparent to me, having spent a year away in Norway. Statements regarding religion and sexism emerged on numerous occasions during the interviews, and sometimes I found myself in uncomfortable situations – hearing prejudiced statements against LGBTQ, for example. In those situations, I tried to control my thoughts and be neutral, not exposing my personal opinions and changing the subject or the focus of the conversation.

Moreover, both women and men gave me sexist statements about feminine roles and duties. The household is widely regarded as a feminine arena. Although many women work outside the house nowadays, the domestic responsibilities are usually reinforced in a sexist manner. I knew this subject would arise, so I prepared myself not to react against it or to show that I was uncomfortable when people mentioned it. To read more about gender issues, see subsection 4.3.1.

Another Brazilian cultural trait that is more evident among the poor is what I named as humbleness. People from lower classes tend to be humble to the extreme and think they are worth less than educated and/or richer people. “Do you want to talk to me? Why don’t you talk to my boss? I don’t have much to say and I will give you wrong answers.” I heard that kind of statement many times when approaching people to do the interviews.

It created some situations that I had to work around so that neither the bosses nor the possible interviewees felt disregarded. Values of humbleness are very much connected to the Christian and colonial heritages that are still present in Brazil, even among the non-religious. I discuss thoroughly the value of humbleness and its origins in subsection 4.3.1.

Another situation I faced was that some people were afraid to voice their opinions regarding public services. I went to the field on the verge of the presidential and governor elections, a delicate timing to inquire about public infrastructure. It may sound strange that people in a democratic country are afraid of exposing their opinion about the government’s performance, but unfortunately in Brazil votes are still a bargaining chip, especially in smaller towns where social networks are limited. People are concerned about their political views becoming public, as many depend on politicians and political schemes to maintain their jobs and social benefits.

Although one should be prepared to deal with informants’ expectations on getting something in return for their contribution, especially when researching the poor (Scheyvens and Storey 2010, 181), I was not exposed to this situation. Nobody requested, much less insinuated that they wanted money or favours as a payback. However, as explained by the authors (*ibid.*), I have faced internal dilemmas during and after some interviews with very poor people, and I found myself trying to give something in return because of their vulnerability.

3 Conceptual framework

To interpret the information collected, I used the idea of conceptual framework from Maxwell (2013, 39-40). A conceptual framework is a group of concepts that supports and informs the research. In this thesis, the conceptual framework presented here explains the key concepts that guide the analysis and interpretation.

A Theory is a set of propositions (discursive or algebraic) which, when seeking to explain why or how situations (processes, events or states of affairs) come to be the way they are, identifies what entities to look out for (relevant and important entities, whose properties and dispositions will normally be described) and in what relationship those entities stand vis-à-vis one another. (Warde 2014, 280)

As stated above, a theory is a frame, which helps one when approaching and exploring a given phenomenon within a specific set of logics. I consider choosing a theoretical framework as important as choosing a topic and a research question, as it may alter the way the studied subject shall be scrutinized.

When I had to decide on which theory to employ in my thesis, I wanted to be sure that I would work with something that could give me useful tools instead of presenting barriers. Besides, I ought to consider employing a theory that could cover the subjective features of my topic. With that in mind and after reading several studies about consumption and consumption theories, I decided to approach this thesis through Social Practice Theory (SPT).

In this study, I am especially interested in understanding the practices affected and originated by changes in consumption, thus, my focus lays within the part of SPT regarding consumption. Moreover, my interests concern how practices define behaviours, and in which way those practices interfere on perceptions – since the scrutiny of perceptions are the core of my work. In light of that, I believe SPT provides the best set of tools and frames for the examination of my topic.

With the SPT in mind, I designed my interview guide and prepared myself for the fieldwork research. I tried to be aware of the chosen theory while collecting and examining primary data, as well as when I choose to employ secondary data to enrich my analysis. With a very broad scope, SPT is complex though versatile. It works well to

investigate social occurrences and to understand how mind and body work together in the design of everyday practices.

In this chapter, I explain the SPT within the focus of this study. Additionally, relevant concepts existent in my research questions and in my findings are also scrutinized, laying the foundation for understanding the forthcoming analysis. The concept of “consumption” is presented first, as an introduction to SPT. Then, I explore “public goods” and “desire”, both being relevant concepts within the outcomes of my fieldwork.

Furthermore, an exposition of concepts and definitions regarding “class” is needed to understand the segment of the population here scrutinized. At first, I expose different definitions of “class”, and then I introduce the concepts of “middle class”, “new middle class” and its critiques. Thus, I build up the context to present the term “new consumer” and justify its employment in the perspective of this study.

3.1 Consumption

Conventional economics theorises consumption behaviours as simple purchases that are justified by necessities and built upon rationality. Fine and Leopold (1993, 46-48) stress that mainstream economics focus on the rational consumer and on “individual utility maximization”, meaning that the buyer decision process would rely on the relation between price and utility alone. In that sense, non-rational attributes and non-utility maximising aspects are set aside. Therefore, the approach of conventional economics simplifies the consumer as a shallow rational being, who builds choices mostly on rational aspects, aiming to extract maximum value from the aforementioned income.

However, the questions raised by this thesis demand a broader approach of consumption phenomena, allowing me to examine its multidimensionality. The anthropologist Harold Wilhite (2008, 3) defines consumption as “the acquisition and use of things”. In contrast with the conventional economics approach, this non-economic conceptualization of consumption is simple, but comprehensive.

Furthermore, a broader concept of consumption is crucial to this specific study, as I am here investigating low-class consumers and their practices. Firstly, “acquisition” means more than simply “buy”. A thing does not necessarily have to be purchased, but can also

be acquired by other means, such as gifts, for example. Some of my informants also received appliances by donation. Thus, the way in which they acquire these appliances does not exclude them from my study. Moreover, it does not exclude them as consumers. Secondly, to scrutinize consumption phenomena, it is mandatory to consider the use of things in order to understand the resulting alterations in practices.

With the given definition in mind, I move forward to the next section and the introduction of the chosen theory.

3.2 Social Practice Theory in consumption

According to Warde (2014, 279), theories of practices are relevant to the study of consumption as social phenomena, given the nature of its analytical framework.

Against the model of the sovereign consumer, practice theories emphasise routine over actions, flow and sequence over discrete acts, dispositions over decisions, and practical consciousness over deliberation. In reaction to the cultural turn, emphasis is placed upon doing over thinking, the material over the symbolic, and embodied practical competence over expressive virtuosity in the fashioned presentation of self (ibid., 286).

In view of that, SPT has been employed by researchers to investigate consumption as well as sustainability solutions to the world's current environmental and social challenges. SPT is complex but comprehensive, its rationale is useful to approach consumption, providing the necessary tools to analyse the subjectivities that surround these phenomena.

To understand how SPT works, it is necessary to introduce the concept of practice. Reckwitz's definition of practice is an interesting one, as the author elucidates the multiple "layers" that a practice contains, relating mind, body, things and knowledge:

A 'practice' (*Praktik*) is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. (Reckwitz 2002, 249)

In that sense, to investigate practices, it is necessary to unfold its numerous dimensions.

The dimension of Reflexivity, which englobes rationality and cognition, is clearly engaged in consumers' choices and behaviours, although this single aspect is insufficient to investigate consumption through SPT lenses. Moreover, rational aspects are affected by culture and beliefs, thus what may appear as a purely rational choice can in fact be based on cultural traits. Thus, Reflexivity is an element to be considered when using SPT approach, but the scrutiny must be applied in a multifaceted manner.

In order to add the needed complexity to consumption theories, Sahakian & Wilhite's version of SPT suggests the inclusion of three more elements to the Reflexivity element stated above: Culture, Sociality and Materiality (Sahakian and Wilhite 2014, 26-27). To understand the logic behind the SPT pillars, it is first necessary to introduce the concepts of practice, body and habit.

3.2.1 Experiential knowledge: bodies and habits

Practices, as defined above, are intrinsic to people and to the material world, and the presence of bodies is a prerequisite for practices to happen. The idea of perceiving the body as a complex unit was concealed by the conception of "mind/body duality" introduced by Descartes, who proposed that all thought is disembodied and logical" (Wallenborn and Wilhite 2014, 56). Namely, human thoughts are exclusively rational in line with Descartes.

The Cartesian concepts of rationality are strongly rooted in today's Western society. Its heritage is still so strong that, for instance, synonymous words to "irrational" have mainly negative connotations such as "unreasonable", "foolish", "crazy", "ridiculous", "absurd", "silly", and even "unfounded".

To refute the limited interpretation of the body as an entity entirely submissive to the rational mind, practice theorists attempt to clarify the abilities of the body and to restructure its concept. As stressed by Wallenborn and Wilhite (2014, 57) "A body is a spatiotemporal entity that can to some extent be identified by coordinates (...) Second, a body is a place where activity and events occur".

What is more, bodies and practices are mutually dependent, and the replication of practices might produce embodied knowledge (Sahakian and Wilhite 2014, 28-29).

Thus, bodies are multidimensional entities, comprising more than the material realm, but also functioning as “vessels for experiential knowledge”, as a storage of irrational knowledge that is revealed through practices – irrational in the sense that this knowledge is not necessarily consciously processed by the brain (Wallenborn and Wilhite 2014, 57). In that sense, Warde (2005, 140) clarifies:

(...) a practice has a set of established understandings, procedures and objectives. Such formal and informal codifications govern conduct within that practice, though often without much reflection or conscious awareness on the part of the bearers. Thus theories of practice emphasize processes like habituation, routine, practical consciousness, tacit knowledge, tradition, and so forth.

Additionally, embodied knowledge, habits or routines are practices that do not demand cognitive contemplation to be carried out, as this knowledge is already stored in the body. That is to say, a habit concerns experiences/actions/practices assimilated by the body and not by the rational mind. Hence, those practices can be naturally replicated – the popular expression “learn by heart” is the common knowledge conceptualization for habit. While every habit is built by repeated practices, this does not necessarily mean that every practice will create a habit (Sahakian and Wilhite 2014, 28). In the following excerpt, Wilk exemplifies well the subjective experiences of routines or habits (Wilk 2009, 148):

I tried brushing my teeth holding the brush in my left hand instead of my right. The new action does not feel right the first few times. It has a nagging feeling, like a tooth with a chip in it, you cannot stop running your tongue over that spot. You have to keep doing it, until eventually the feeling of wrongness slowly fades away. It is more likely that you just forget to feel the wrongness one day – you are distracted by something else and your attention does not return. The next thing you know you are doing it without thinking about it. You forget to worry, and go on without thinking. (...)Your body will take over, and your mind can move on to other things.

Despite the fact that rooted habits may come naturally to the body, they “are not automatically a tool of disciplinary restraint” (Shove, Trentmann, and Wilk 2009, 9). Therefore, although the majority of people are not necessarily conscious of the process through which a habit is acquired, they can still intentionally avoid a habit, “forgetting” it or substituting it for something else (Wilk 2009, 149) – as when people who want to quit smoking start chewing gum or eating goodies instead of lighting a cigarette.

3.2.2 Culture, Sociality and Materiality

With the fundamental concepts of body, practice and habit in mind, it is possible to take back to the elements of SPT. As mentioned above, complementary to the Reflexivity element, which concerns the cognitive attributes that leads to consumption, there are three other spheres helping to shape practices: Culture, Sociality and Materiality.

Culture, or embodied knowledge, relates to the body as a complex unit, “a place where activity and events occur” (Wallenborn and Wilhite 2014, 57) as previously explained. As the term “embodied knowledge” indicates, it relates to the body’s dispositions and cognitive processes, acquired through social experiences (Sahakian and Wilhite 2014, 28).

Cultural aspects and environmental features are capable of effecting experiential knowledge, “teaching” the body, giving agency to it and creating dispositions. An example is temperature adaptation: I, as a Brazilian, struggled to adapt during the first winter season I spent in Norway. I had to wear twice as many layers of clothing and some wool-underwear compared to my North-European colleagues, as my embodied knowledge was built in the tropics and my body did not know how to face the cold weather.

However, after two harsh Norwegian winters, it seems that something has changed. This spring, I visited Spain on a 19 degrees Celsius day and I was able to wear a dress and ballerinas, while the Spanish around me were wearing heavy jackets and boots – after two years, my body has finally learned how to support lower temperatures.

The same occurred to expatriated workers from Kerala after experiencing air conditioning (AC) in the Gulf, as Harold Wilhite (2008, 101-102) found out in his ethnographic research in India. Men who lived their entire lives in India get used to air-conditioned lower temperatures after working overseas in the Gulf. The learning in these men’s bodies is so intense that using AC appliances became a necessity to control the temperature inside their families’ houses back in Kerala.

Cultural aspects such as cultural traits and ideologies also have agency in influencing practices and creating embodied knowledge, as they too determine body dispositions

(Sahakian and Wilhite 2014, 29). Examples of how cultural traits affect practices are presented further in my analysis.

Sociality refers to the examination of tacit social norms and social performances in effecting practices. Those norms are shaped by cultural traits, relating to the previously exposed element – in subsection 4.3.1, I explore in depth the tacit social norms, or intrinsic values, that I have found relevant to this research. About the relevance of the social sphere, Sahakian and Wilhite (2014, 30) outline: “tacitly accepted social rules and values contribute to the stability of practices”.

Regarding the social aspects of consumption, Campbell (1995, 111) affirms:

[Consumer goods] may serve to compensate the individual for feelings of inferiority, insecurity or loss, or to symbolise achievement success or power. They also commonly serve to communicate social distinctions or reinforce relationships of superiority and inferiority between individual groups. They can (...) express attitudes or states of mind, or communicate specific messages from one person to another. Finally, they may be instrumental in creating or confirming an individual's sense of self personal identity.

Campbell's statement draws upon the evolution of theories and concepts on the topic of consumption and sociality. The author argues about the social functionalities of consumption, i.e. how people “use” consumption in different ways, either to handle with emotional states, to make subjective statements or even to better understand their personal identities.

Various scholars have discussed the social dimension of consumption. Weber's conceptualization of the status group highlights the different lifestyles of the ones producing and the ones consuming. Yet, by combining the Marxist concept of “commodity” with semiotics, Baudrillard creates the “commodity-sign” concept. He argues that individuals from capitalist societies are in fact interested in consuming the signs behind the goods, and not necessarily the goods themselves. To Bourdieu, consumption practices have the power to define and produce hierarchical social relations, although this power may be limited by social structures such as *habitus* and personal cultural inheritance, viz. one does not shift his/her social status only by coping with others' consumption standards (ibid., 103-108).

Referring to the domain of dispositions, Bourdieu explains his concept of *habitus* as “necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general, transposable disposition which carries out a systematic, universal application – beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt” (Bourdieu 1984, 170). Explicitly, every person has their own dispositions, according to the necessities imposed on them by the environment where they are located. Personal dispositions will shape practices and thus habits in a non-rational way, as explained by Wilhite (2013, 62):

Bourdieu proposed that human actions have sociomaterial histories (...) Moving and acting in sociomaterial space carves out predispositions for subsequent actions that are embedded in bodies, practices, and material settings. These embedded predispositions are important to understanding how and why practices stabilize and change.

In keeping with Bourdieu and Wacquant (cited in Sahakian and Wilhite 2014, 29), *habitus* can structure/organize practices while those practices can also structure/organize *habitus*.

Thus, a given social group determines behaviours and patterns of consumption for its members. Hence, in order to belong symbolically to a given group, one unconsciously follows its standards. To state a divergent position, one can adopt the opposite trends and behaviours defined by the undesirable groups, such as counter-culture movements like the Punks and the Hippies did. Nonetheless, counter-culture movements have too generated new social groups, which gradually shaped their own standards to be followed by its members.

The Materiality pillar concerns the knowledge of things, or the agency things have in defining consumption behaviour, as scripts: “Technologies are ‘scripted’ in that they embody a certain form of knowledge and moral judgement, which leads to new reciprocal dispositions between people and things, and indeed ‘new forms of knowledge about the world’”(Akrich cited in Sahakian and Wilhite 2014, 29).

Regarding the notion of script brought by Madeleine Akrich and Bruno Latour, Peter-Paul Verbeek (2006, 361-362) explains the multiplicity of technology and its direct effects on users’ experiences and performances, thus giving things a much more relevant role in determining behaviour than its supposed usages would suggest.

Technologies (or things) are scripted within dispositions that have the ability to interact with practices, shaping them and being shaped by them (Sahakian and Wilhite 2014, 29).

To illustrate the agency and scripts of technologies, Verbeek (2006, 362) uses the example of two cups to clarify how the different materials used to manufacture the cups determine the users' actions. A cup made in plastic states "disposal" and so "asks" to be cast away after one use. A porcelain cup, however, "claims" to be washed and kept for further use. Hence, it is possible to understand the power of materiality in determining practices and, accordingly, consumption, as things and infrastructure are capable to impose their scripts to its users.

In view of that, a case brought by Hans Rosling in his documentary "Don't Panic - The Truth About Population" (2013) shows how a simple object such as a bicycle shifts the routine of a rural family from Mozambique and is a good example of materiality within consumption. Andre, Olivia and their eight children worked for two years to save money to buy the family's first bicycle. It may sound insignificant, but after they bought it, everybody's routine changed drastically, and so did their chances to reach a better life condition yet to Andre and Olivia, but especially to their children.

The material aspects of the bicycle allow the family to spare hours of walking to reach their crop fields, the water well and the market. The bicycle's script also lets Andre carry more produce to sell in the market. This alone, by Andre's calculations, will allow them to buy a motorcycle in the near future and improve even more their productivity. What is more, the hours saved during the day thanks to the practicalities of the bicycle allow Andre and Olivia to reach night classes in time. For the first time, the couple is having access to education and literacy.

This example can of course be analysed through the other SPT pillars, but the material aspects of the bicycle were decisive to the Mozambican family's purchase. However, the alterations that occurred in their routines after the introduction of the bicycle are affecting different spheres of their lives, changing the way they socialize and even their rationality, as they have access to education.

The SPT pillars Culture / Materiality / Sociality / Reflexivity are presented detached with didactic purposes to simplify the understanding of the theory. Still, as the example illustrates, the pillars are always interrelated thus being capable of mutually influencing each other. The SPT elements can be used alone or combined in different forms as valuable tools to investigate consumption practices, alterations in those practices and perceptions.

Consequently, considering the multiple spheres brought by this theory, I used the SPT tools to investigate the social phenomena I faced in the field. My findings are depicted in the next chapters.

3.3 Public goods

Consumption is usually associated with the acquisition of private goods, however, consumption can as well be analysed through the perspective of public goods.

Collective consumption goods or public goods differ from private goods for two basic characteristics: excludability and rivalry. Therefore, as it is not excludable, a public good does not disallow anyone from enjoying it. Similarly, its non-exclusivity or low rivalry feature permit everyone to benefit from it at the same time (Calhoun 2002).

For instance, a citizen cannot be excluded from enjoying urban lighting when the city's infrastructure is in place (non-excludability). Accordingly, the fact that one citizen is enjoying urban lighting does not stop other residents from enjoying it simultaneously (non/low rivalry). Nevertheless, some public goods may have a limit to rivalry, e.g. transportation systems, which have a limited capacity of passengers (ibid.).

Because of its features, public goods are not quite as profitable as private goods. This explains why the state is usually responsible for the provision of such goods. As stated by Paul A. Samuelson, the state should have the responsibility of providing public goods, as the economist attaches the provision of essential public goods to wellbeing, defending the obligation of the government in securing a wellbeing state for its citizens (Samuelson 1954).

Despite the fact that Samuelson's theory is contentious – some disagree that the provision of wellbeing is a state duty – public goods are currently provided by

governments in many countries, including Brazil, as a payback for tax revenue. Therefore, the majority of people inserted in formal societies are consumers of public goods.

3.4 Desire and the good life

With the intention of contextualising how the notion of desire is employed in this study, it is necessary to draw an overview of the “good life” concept. In an effort to bring diverse concepts of wellbeing together in a unique definition, Edward F. Fischer (2014, 5-6) introduces his idea of the good life.

By comprising complex and subjective dimensions, Fischer’s definition exceeds the simple compilation of previous concepts. The “good life” is composed of three subjective domains – *aspiration and opportunity, dignity and fairness, and commitment to a larger purpose* – sided with three objective ones – *adequate material resources, physical health and safety, and family and social relations*.

Similar to SPT, Fischer’s “good life” criteria are also influenced by the cultural, social and environmental contexts in which the individuals are inserted. The contexts, according to Fischer, may set standards and dispositions for what one pursues. To be exact, the concept is not a generic formula, but a framework to support customized analysis of the “good life” (ibid.).

The author emphasises the importance of subjective factors in people’s engagement with the world, thus explaining its relevance for an accurate understanding of the “good life”. Together with “hopes”, “fears”, “imaginations” and “aspirations”, “desire” is one of those subjective factors (ibid., 5-7).

Desire is a complex human dimension that is different from need, interests and agency. “Need can be required: one can eat to satiate hunger, and one can drink to satiate thirst. But desire is eternal – an ongoing, future-oriented process” (Fischer and Benson 2006, 11). Besides, it differs from “interests”, as “desire” is a collective process; and different from “agency”, as “it [desire] emphasizes the production of wants and not just the practices needed to achieve a desired end”. Hence, desire goes further than what is wanted, encompassing as well how one wants – or the process of wanting (ibid., 6).

Moreover, cultural images, moral values, collective experiences and political and economic structures create dispositions and shape “desire”. In that sense, desire is what motivates one to partake in specific events, in which one identifies oneself morally, economically and/or symbolically (Benson and Fischer 2007, 801-803).

3.5 Class

Human societies have been analysed and classified within classes through various perspectives, according to different aims. Inversely from Marx’s social class division between “owners of means of production and owners of labour power” (Wright 2005, 10), Bourdieu’s understandings of class are more sophisticated. Consistent with the sociologist, social classes cannot be defined by objective parameters alone, but the complexity of social interactions must be taken into consideration (Nguyen-Marshall et al. 2012, 9).

Bourdieu understands social class as the position one occupies in the social space. One’s position is determined by his/her symbolic capital, which is composed of social, economic and cultural capital. One’s social position creates dispositions and hence *habitus*, which may translate into tastes and influence practices – returning to the previously explanations of dispositions, *habitus* and practices (ibid., 9-10).

Nevertheless, “individuals who are proximate in social space do not necessarily identify with one another or act collectively” (Grenfell 2008, 92) . By way of explanation, social identities are not necessarily determined by social positions. In that sense, “class is an essentially contested concept” (ibid., 98), and a general definition for it would not be accurate enough to be practical.

Therefore, taking into consideration the social approach of this thesis and my interest in understanding the subjective aspects of consumption of a specific group of people, the use of a limited class label became impractical. Nonetheless, I understand the importance of introducing the Brazilian official social class system as well as the concept of “new middle class”, commonly used to categorize the segment of the population approached here.

After introducing the definitions, I present its critiques and defend why I prefer not to employ the “new middle class” concept but, in contrast, to call my informants as “new consumers”.

The Brazilian official class system

As a response to recent social and economic alterations in the country, the Brazilian Strategic Affairs Secretariat for the Republic Presidency (SAE) together with UNPD and *Caixa Econômica Federal*¹⁶ launched the project *Vozes da Classe Média* (middle class voices) to contribute to define this specific segment of the population’s profile and understand its needs and aspirations (SAE 2015).

In line with the programme’s website, “In the last ten years, 35 million people became part of the Brazilian middle class, which represented 38% of the total population in 2002, accounting for 52% of it today, numbering more than 100 million Brazilians” (ibid.)¹⁷.

By analysing the data presented by SAE, one can think that Brazil went through an impressive economic growth and income re-distribution process in the last decade. However, when investigating the report published by the project *Vozes da Classe Média* in respect to the metrics employed to define what parcel of the population is now considered by the government to be the middle class, it becomes clear how unequal the Brazilian population still is.

The new method was released in 2012 by SEA, but it started to be generally used in 2014. According to the current criterion, the middle class is defined by literally finding the average per capita income of the totality of the population – the amount found by the research was 205,26 USD (see Figure 3). Approximately 52% of the population with income around the midpoint are categorized as middle class (O Globo 2014). That is to say, literally, all people making a wage around the Country’s mid-wage are categorized as middle class. The graph below (Figure 3) illustrates the method.

¹⁶ *Caixa Econômica Federal* is the Brazilian state-owned bank by which welfare programmes, social security, habitation loans and other public programmes are financed.

¹⁷ Statement translated from Portuguese.

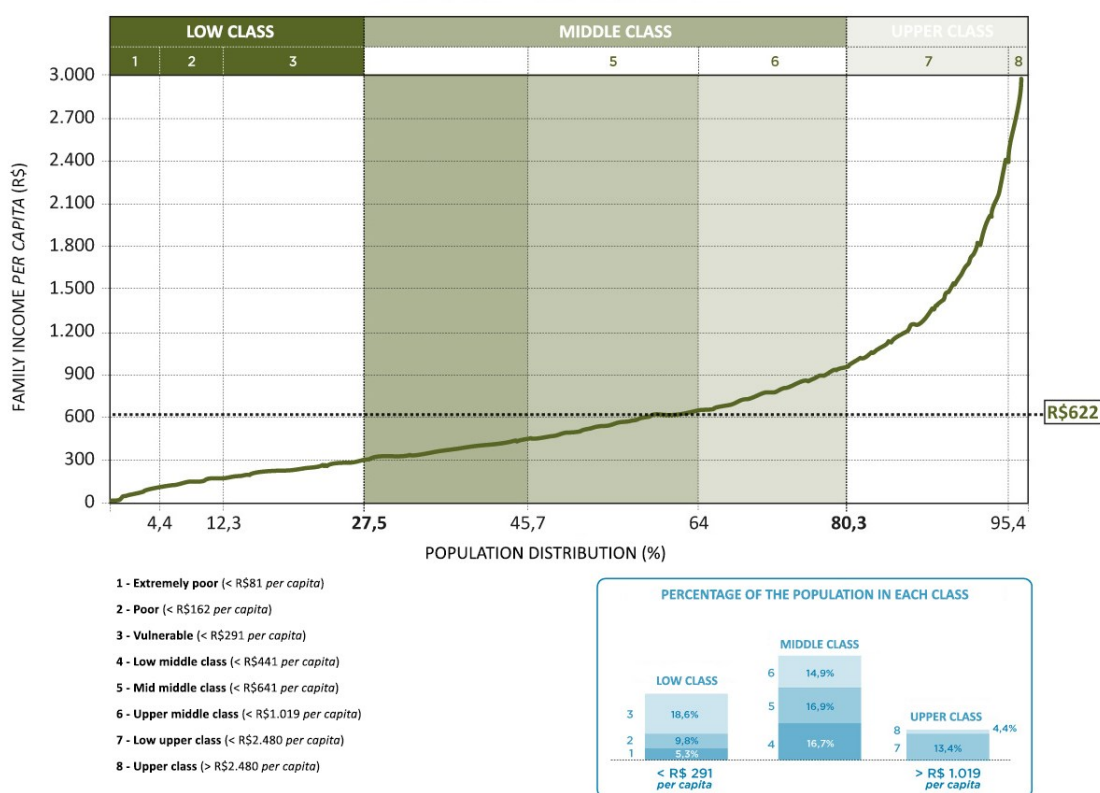


Figure 3: Income classes in Brazil according to the new criterion – 2012. Source: SAE (2013)

The criterion considers the families' monthly per capita income to define the low-class: between 26,73 USD and 96,03 USD; the middle class: between 96,03 USD and 336,27 USD; and the upper class: over 336,27 USD. In addition, subcategories were defined to help in creating and guiding specific public policies, along with the authors of the methodology (SAE 2013).

Although today's official minimum monthly wage is 260,04 USD (MTE 2015), the method developed by SAE considers the real income per capita, making it clear that the earnings of the average Brazilian are already close to what is considered minimally adequate by the government. Using an average Brazilian family comprising of four members as an example and assuming they earn a monthly income of 100 USD per capita, then this family would be labelled as middle class today even though their income exceeds the minimum salary by only 140 USD.

Critiques speculate that the new criterion is a tool produced by the government to fabricate a non-existent middle class, hence, manipulating the real conjunctures and faking a favourable economic moment that never existed (Maciel 2012).

Additionally, the use of income as the only variable to define the classes was seen as a mistake, as the given variable may float according to the economic scenario and may be vulnerable to economic crisis, which on the word of the professor José Afonso Mazzon (cited in *ibid.*) is not necessarily true regarding social classification.

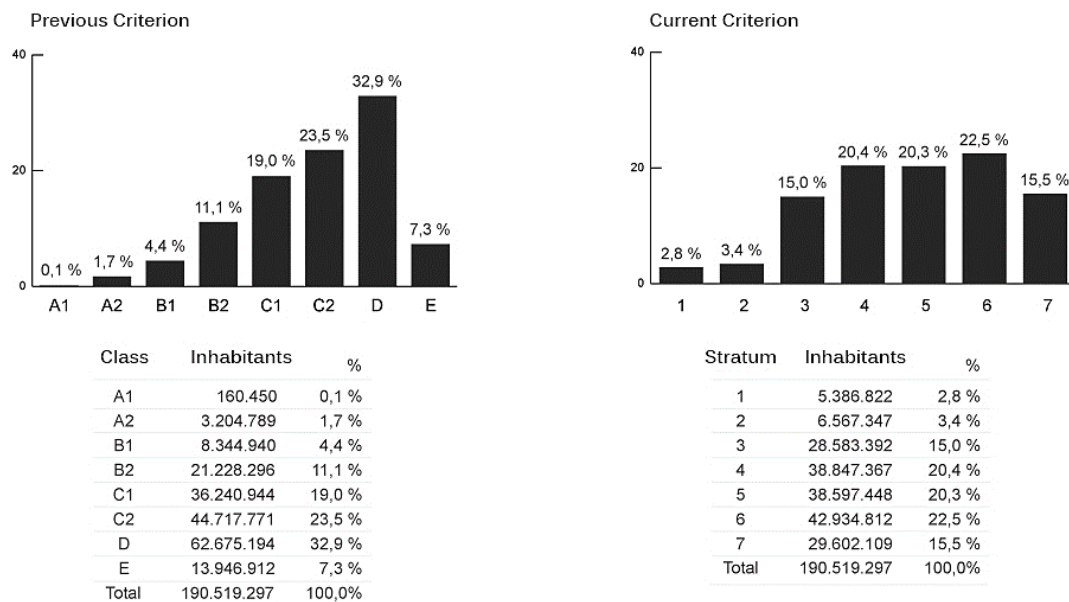


Figure 4: Brazilian income distribution according to the previous and the current criteria (considering that A/1 are the richest and E/7 the poorest). Source: Vieira (2014)

In order to substantiate the classes' methodology, Mazzon suggests that investments and estates should as well be included in the analysis, as these factors are telling of the stages of economic security in which the families in fact are.

The criticisms can be well understood by observing the representations of both the previous and current methodologies employed for social classification in Brazil. When comparing both criteria (see Figure 4), it becomes clear that the visual representation of the current criterion may lead to an interpretation of an economically more equal society.

Nevertheless, it is similarly clear that the extremes are hidden in today's criterion, as it is easier to grasp the difference in income distribution using the previous method. While the previous criterion neglects the stratifications of the poorest, the new criterion possibly disregards the decomposition of the richest.

Whilst I agree it may be useful to have a broad understanding of the biggest part of the population when designing policies and governmental strategies, it seems unnatural to

call the majority of Brazilian as middle class when the struggles of the masses are empirically undeniable.

Although the middle class is not a narrow concept, one can consider that widely held definitions accept that middle class families have “sufficient economic income and capital to be able to consume beyond their subsistence needs” (Wilhite 2008, 10). Thus, taking into consideration the Brazilian minimum wage and the per capita income range of the middle class, the new criterion becomes dubious. In fact, it leads to the impression that the ones who are officially pegged as the middle class in Brazil today are people with several economic struggles.

The middle class and the strugglers

Definitions for the middle class are diverse and vary according to the focus of studies and researches. Income, possessions, professional roles and even the amount of daily meals have already been employed to define it (Wilhite 2008, 9). A consensus about a single definition is non-existent (Lange and Meier 2009, 10) and scholars agree it is better to refer to middle class as a compound of different groups than as an homogeneous stratus (Laroque cited in *ibid.*, 8).

Although “consumption is invariably posed as an emerging element in middle class identity” (Wilhite 2008, 10), it is also a middle class feature to pursue for differentiation, or “distinction” from the working class (Nguyen-Marshall et al. 2012, 9). Therefore, I believe my informants do not fit the middle class concept. Instead, they are more likely to identify with the working class. However, my informants’ consumption patterns have changed over time (see section 4.1) and it is clear that now they consume above subsistence levels, although it does not mean that those people are enjoying economic stability.

As Nancy Birdsall (2014) brought up to discussion, it is incorrect to affirm that people who jump above the poverty line (>2 USD per day) instantly have the economic stability and the way of life associated with the middle class in the developed world. The author believes that calling those people middle class is a dangerous fallacy made by many, including important international organizations. The players that should be

designing programmes to extinguish poverty neglect the peculiarities of that in-between segment of the population who still face the risks of falling back into poverty.

Birdsall states that people living in Latin America start enjoying income-secure at an income of about 10 USD daily per capita incomes. Consistent with her statements, people who are above the poverty line relying on up to 10 USD per day need an appropriate label that expresses their real economic features and fragility: “the vulnerable, the anxious poor, the nascent middle class, the *strivers* ((...) it captures the positive energy and readiness to work hard that characterize this group of escapees from dire poverty). All these labels reflect the reality of life for people not yet in the secure middle class” (ibid.).

Thus, the parcel of the population that is not considered poor, but still is not economically safe is labelled as “strugglers”, or “new poor” by Birdsall, Lustig, and Meyer (2014, 1). The paper *The Strugglers: The New Poor in Latin America?* considers and discusses the segment of the population living on a daily income between 4 and 10 USD. It aims to decrease their economic vulnerability by rising conscience to the importance of including “the strugglers” in specific public policies and monetary programmes that take into consideration the peculiarities of that segment (ibid.). According to the paper, the strugglers live in an unstable economic situation, and supportive measures could help them jump into the middle class. On the other hand, negligence can throw them back into poverty (ibid., 1-3).

3.5.1 New consumers

Although the “strugglers” definition by Birdsall fits my informants segment of the population, the concept lacks deeper analysis into the group’s characteristics regarding consumption. Thus, considering the criticisms of the official Brazilian class definition and the lack of adherence of the studied group with the general identity of the middle class, I therefore suggest employing the term “new consumers”. This is as the people who became consumers recently in Brazil are the main concern of this study, and not necessarily the social class label given to them neither the country’s official definition.

Regarding consumption phenomena, the “new consumers” concept places emphasis on acquisition of durable goods and increase of purchasing power. Myers and Kent (2003,

4963) define the “new consumers” as people from all over the world who in the year 2000 had a purchasing power parity (PPP)¹⁸ equivalent to 10,000 USD per year – considering the income of a four-member household, or 2,500 USD/PPP per capita. In the authors’ point of view, this parameter “(...) enables wide-ranging purchases such as household appliances and televisions, air conditioners, personal computers, and other electronics, among other prerequisites of an affluent lifestyle”.

Irrespective of whether Myers and Kent specific definition of “new consumers” fits my informants’ profiles, the objective basis I employed to decide who should or should not be interviewed in the field was more subjective than their concept. I considered “new consumers” to be the people who, during the past two decades, have experienced alterations in their consumption patterns – particularly of durable goods – as a result of purchasing power increase and access to credit lines, consequently altering the way they perceive their everyday lives.

In summary, the term “new consumers” is employed here as a mix of Myers and Kent’s and the “strugglers” concepts, in the sense that my informants share the objective features of the former and the identity and struggles of the latter.

¹⁸ The PPP or purchasing power parity for Brazil in 2000 is \$/PPP\$ 2.04 (Myers and Kent 2003, 4964).

4 The Cabo Frio case study

I will now introduce the case study drawn upon the new consumers in Cabo Frio. To build an interesting and understandable logic for the case with the focus on my research questions, I present the data analysis within a basic structure of “why, who, what and how”.

First, to answer “why” I contemplated investigating such matter, I present the picture of the consumption alterations in Cabo Frio and in Brazil over the last decades based on secondary data and its consequences on the population’s financial health. In order to discuss and comprehend these changes, it is imperative to understand the rationale employed in this study, as its main point of interest is people’s perceptions of those changes.

Next, I introduce my informants, presenting “who” they are, how their families are composed, which are the dynamics within their families and how roles are distributed.

After explaining who the people of this analysis are, I introduce “what” I found to be aspects affecting their practices regarding consumption: Cultural traits and tacit norms (presented as intrinsic values of humbleness and gender related issues), media players and other relevant actors who perform in the Brazilian scenario. Accordingly, I present and explain how those factors influence people’s behaviour.

Then, I disclose “how” the changes in practices and habits occurred and “how” my informants perceive these phenomena. I explore their perceptions in respect to different levels of the phenomena, concerning their routines, their relations with acquired goods as well as the way they perceive the changing social conjuncture.

4.1 A picture of the alterations

The data presented here illustrate how intensively the acquisitions of household appliances occurred from the beginning of the 90’s to the present day. IBGE performs a periodical data collection about household structures and appliances; however, the data series from the period I am interested in were not available at the municipality level.

Thus, I have chosen to use the national data series to illustrate the changes from the 90's to the 2010's.

I chose to present only the appliances that had historical data series available within the given timeframe and that were relevant to this study (Figure 5). I use the subsequent graph (Figure 6) to illustrate my point by showing the appliances present in the average household in Cabo Frio in 2010 – note that this survey considers only durable goods. Though the data series are different, it is still possible to see the magnitude of the alterations, as the presence of the appliances in both territories is similar – Cabo Frio is part of the Brazilian context, after all.

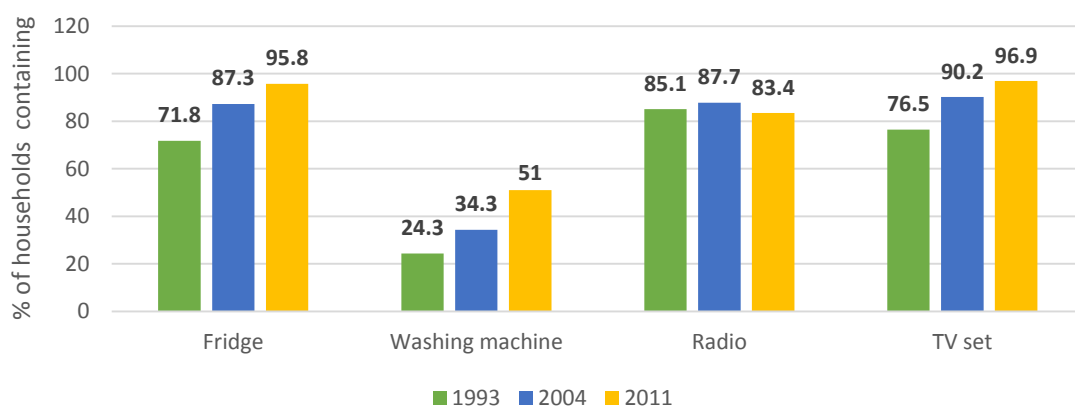


Figure 5: Percentage of households containing durable goods – Data series level: National. Source: IBGE (2015)

According to my informants' opinions, the basic items a habitable household should have are a fridge, a stove and a TV set. Other appliances can be acquired over time, but this kit was mainly considered as a must-have. As Brazilian stoves are usually fuelled by gas and not electricity, I did not investigate this in depth— my main interest when I went to the field concerned electric and electronic appliances. With regard to the fridge and the TV set, my informants' perceptions about essentials were quite close to the general buying behaviour: almost every household in today Brazil has both a fridge and a TV set.

Looking back ten or twenty years ago, the popularization of these appliances has been considerably similar – perhaps the fridge slightly behind in time compared to the TV set – despite the practical utility of the fridge in such a warm country. Notwithstanding, I have not heard any particular comment on radio appliances in the field. The understated occurrence of this appliance appeals for more analysis. Even though it is still

widespread, the popularity of the radio has suffered small variations, with no significant growth. I am inclined to suggest that perhaps it is being substituted by TV sets or even by electronics such as PCs and smartphones.

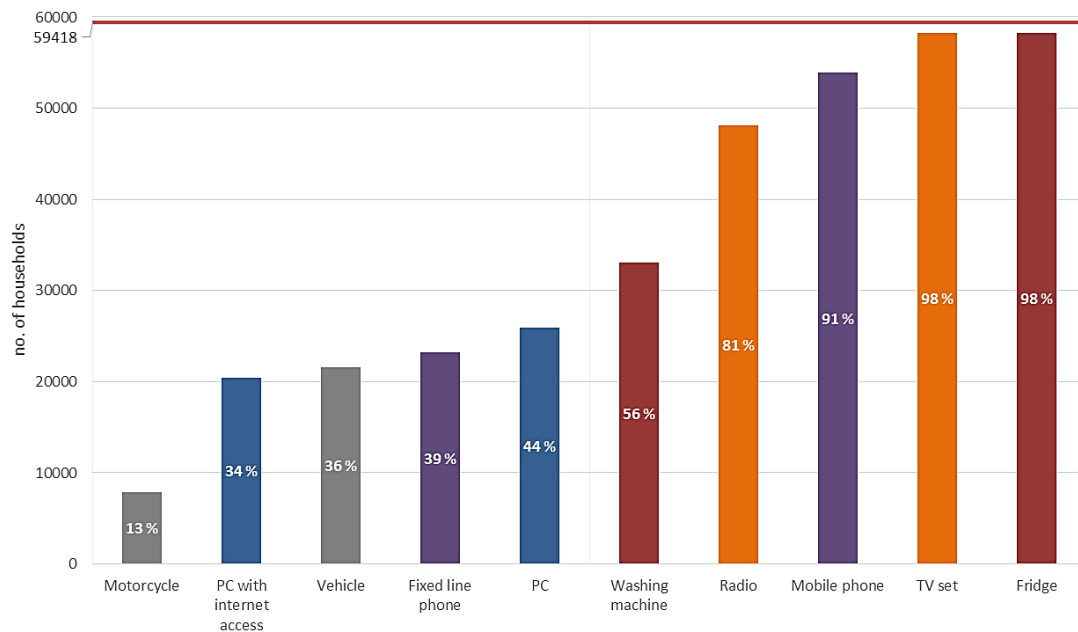


Figure 6: Permanent private households¹⁹ containing durable goods. Data series level: Cabo Frio municipality. Source: IBGE (2014c)

Figure 6 gives a picture of the 59,418 *Cabofrienses* households. The presence of the fridge and the TV set in Cabo Frio are in line with the national data, while the incidence of the washing machine is slightly greater in the town – 55,6% against 51% in the national level.

Furthermore, it seems like the mobile phone has been added to the must-have kit, as it is present in 91% of the households while only 39% still have fixed line phones. This fact is particularly interesting if we consider that each household might have more than one mobile phone – potentially one per dweller. Although the infrastructure of telecommunications is still under development in Brazil and have much to be improved (OCDE 2007, 148), the regulations imposed by the government to the sector from the

¹⁹ PRIVATE HOUSEHOLD: One, two or five maximum families' dwelling, even if localized in an industrial establishment, commercial establishment etc., including construction site where up to five people reside, even if they are not related and/or domestic dependent (...) PERMANENT PRIVATE HOUSEHOLD: Dwelling built for residential purpose (house, apartment and room) (IBGE 1991 and Contagem da População 1996 cited in PortalGeoRio 2015) *Statement translated from Portuguese.

90's on, after the privatization of the then state-owned system, had a real impact on the diffusion of mobile services and more recently of Internet access (Valente 2012, 224).

The occurrence of PCs in 44% of the households and the fact that 34% have access to the Internet is a remarkable point. It shows how interactions with media have changed, transitioning from the radio to the TV set and now transforming again to electronic platforms connected to the Internet such as mobile phones and PCs. Those numbers are probably higher nowadays, since the data was collected during the last census in 2010 and the popularization of Internet connection has increased considerably since then. This may have happened given the evolution of the aforementioned regulations, which were responsible for the spread of broadband and mobile Internet services (Valente 2012, 230-231).

Some of my informants cited vehicles, present in 36% of the households in Cabo Frio, as objects of desire. Danilo, Elana and Jenifer told me a car might be their next acquisition, as their families had already been saving money to buy one. Remarkably, the three of them already have motorcycles. Similarly to a case described by Arve Hansen in his work about Vietnam (see Hansen 2015 and Hansen and Nielsen 2014), the local and intercity transportation systems' flaws in Cabo Frio create dispositions in the inhabitants to desire and acquire vehicles (see more details about public services in Chapter 5).

Together with materiality issues, cultural and social aspects strengthen these dispositions, transforming them into a desire. Thus, economic facilitations – such as the tax reducing plans executed during Lula's presidency formerly mentioned, and accessible credit lines – enables a desire to become an acquisition.

As was the case in Hanoi, Cabo Frio used to be a city of bicycles – João still uses his bicycle to commute to work, despite having recently acquired a car. Cabo Frio is a flat, warm and geographically small city, perfect for the use of bicycles. However, from the 2000's on, the use of motor vehicles increased considerably, flooding the town's narrow streets and few avenues with cars, mopeds and motorcycles. In Vietnam, the car is associated with cleanliness and safety from the crowded streets (Hansen 2015, 11-12); in Brazil it is also associated with safety, as it offers protection from urban violence.

One cannot circulate around specific areas walking or riding a bicycle, but the closed cabin of the car provides the feeling of extra security. Moreover, for the new consumers of Cabo Frio, the symbolism around the car is not different from what Hansen and Nielsen (2014, 78) describe in the general emerging South: “it is deeply embedded in conceptions of development and modernity; powerful symbol of status, wealth and affluence; and an object of desire and eminent practical use values”.

Conclusively, it is possible to see how fast the acquisition of durable goods occurred in Brazil and in Cabo Frio during the last decades. In addition, it is interesting to notice the pace of the popularization of some goods to the detriment of others. The TV set and the fridge, for instance, became popular at a similar pace, while the washing machine is still climbing its way to popularity. Nevertheless, there is still space and potential for many appliances to fill the households of Cabo Frio and Brazil.

4.1.1 Increasing defaults

In Brazil, the alterations in consumption patterns among the poor are mostly related to access to social benefits, but also to the increasing amount of credit lines dedicated to this segment.

The tempting offer of merchandise flanked with “accessible” credit lines led the Brazilian population to the highest levels of default in the country’s history. Today, 57 million Brazilians are defaulters – meaning 40% of the adult population (Serasa Experian 2014). Nevertheless, financial specialist Vander Nagata (*ibid.*) agrees that the actual indexes are technically not alarming. However, he believes that consumers’ chronic tendency to lack financial control must be fought with education to avoid the consolidation of a debt culture.

On the words of my informants, planning before purchasing household appliances is a unanimous practice. All of my 13 informants reported that their purchases were always preceded by family discussions and calculations. When asked if they have ever considered getting loans to purchase appliances and other goods, the entire group denied it as a possibility.

In spite of my informants' common statements, secondary data tells a different story for the general Brazilian population. The map of default, a report made by the credit bureau Serasa Experian (2015) indicates that the 2014 delinquency rate²⁰ in Brazil was 24,5%. The same document points that about 40% of the total delinquents are new consumers – classified by the study in two groups: young adults from peripheral neighbourhoods and working urban masse.

I am not implying here that my informants lied to me, but I consider that there is a reason for the gap between people's perceptions, stated in the interviews, and secondary data. I believe that non-payments are a delicate subject to explore in an interview, particularly if it is not the central theme of it. People become embarrassed when talking about debts because of social expectations and the taboos surrounding this matter.

Common statements I heard from many of my informants to explain why they do not acquire debts or loans to purchase goods were: “We cannot step where our legs do not reach” or “We cannot put our hands where our arms do not reach”. It is a popular saying in Brazil, which is very much connected to the value of humbleness explained below in subsection 4.3.1, and it means that one should not aspire for the inaccessible. Accordingly, one should not acquire debts as a principle, which makes discussing the delinquency matter even more delicate to be openly spoken.

However, independent of my group of informants' current financial health, secondary data shows that the delinquency rates are growing in Brazil as a result of the increasing consumption. Furthermore, Brazil faces several problems concerning labelling of credit lines and financial products such as credit cards, loans and *carnês*²¹, which do not display useful information – at least not in a language that is clear enough to finance's layperson, as the regular consumer usually is.

I have struggled to find precise data about interest rates charged by credit cards on their official websites, which are filled with appealing elements to persuade the consumer to order the financial products without knowing its practicalities. In addition, financial education is not part of the Brazilian educational curriculum, therefore, there is a lot of

²⁰ Meaning that 35 million people had payments delayed by more than 90 days after the due dates with sum total of 66 USD or more in the first half of 2014 (Serasa Experian 2015).

²¹ Instalment plans offered by retail chains.

confusion and misunderstanding regarding purchases, loans and default (Mette and Matos 2014, 9). Hence, when the interests rates of financial products aimed at the lower classes are so high – between 7% and 6% per month, according to informal advisors’ blogs – a small mistake can lead to huge personal financial complications.

A Brazilian study focused on low income consumers with default problems testified that the main reasons why people get into debts are impulse purchases, lack of information about financial products, the acquisition of new loans to pay old debts and unforeseen expenses (Mette and Matos 2014, 8-10). According to this study, the lack of knowledge about the extremely high interest rates charged by the financial companies and the charging systems leads to mistakes, making it impossible for many low-class consumers to fulfil their obligations, as it would exceed their income (ibid., 11). It is possible and encouraged by the credit companies that the user may only pay a small amount of the total bill; however, the interest is incised over the entire debt amount every month, resulting in an exponential growth of the debt.

Default is a serious consequence of emerging consumption in a developing country, and Brazil is still learning how to tackle it. Briefly put, similar to the pace of appliances’ consumption, the default rates are growing quickly in Brazil. The regulations to impede the abusive behaviour practiced by the financial companies and label obligations are in place – the Brazilian consumer advocacy law contains those regulations – but, as a system in development, it still lacks operative oversight. Moreover, the population should have access to financial education, which would allow the consumers to be aware of important and tricky features in financial products, avoiding debt’s traps.

4.2 My informants

The group of people on which this study focuses is not a homogeneous one; nevertheless, some common factors bring them together. My informants share similar cultural backgrounds and Brazilian and *Cabofriense*²² identities. Moreover, they have similar incomes and consequently share similar financial struggles. Most of them contribute financially to provide for their families or support a working partner by performing housework and taking care of children.

²² *Cabofriense* is the demonym given to the citizens from Cabo Frio



Figure 7: The informants who allowed me to take and use their pictures. Clockwise: Danilo and his inseparable smartphone; Jenifer at work; Julia with her grandson at her doorstep; Marinalva (right) with a friend. Pictures: Marcela Oliveira Svoren.

In order to understand better my findings vis-à-vis consumption practices, it is important to identify each of my informants and comprehend their peculiarities. Thereby, I briefly introduce my informants based on my perceptions acquired throughout our personal meeting as well as on the information provided by them during the interviews. I subjectively describe who they are and where in Cabo Frio's society they are placed. Further, I explore how their families are composed and how responsibility is shared among its members. Note that I use pseudonyms to protect their identity, including in the pictures' caption.

4.2.1 Who is who? A brief presentation

Julia, my eldest informant, is a sweet 74-year-old retired seamstress who had a hard life and a very poor youth. She started working as a maid at the age of eight to support herself and to financially support her visually impaired father; her mother died when she

was a baby. After getting married, Julia became a seamstress and had to work a lot to fulfil her professional demands and cope with the housework. She and her husband had nine children, none of whom remains at home. Julia is a widow and her husband, who used to be a bus driver and a TV set repairer, did not leave her any wealth.

Today, Julia lives on a minimum wage and relies on her children's financial help – the house where she lives belongs to her daughter's husband, and Julia does not pay for rent. Her perspectives of present and past are particularly interesting, as she had the real experiences of changes without knowing the concepts behind it. She experienced the shift from a very poor life to a more stable financial condition, though still with deprivations. Furthermore, she was a victim of her underprivileged social and gender situation. Julia's estimated monthly household income: 355 USD (plus irregular help from extended family).

Lucília (42) is one of Julia's nine children and she participated in the beginning of the interview, but I have not considered her answers, as she was not there for the entire time and also because she lives in Rio and has a different social dynamic. Julia and Lucília are neo-Pentecostal churchgoers. The neo-Pentecostal community in Brazil is big and politically powerful. They are involved in every level of the society and politics, and they fight to insert traditional values into culture and legislation – anti-homosexual legislation, for example. Lucília's estimated monthly household income: not informed.

Danilo (20) was the youngest person in my group of informants and the only young man I interviewed. He is a doorkeeper at a medical centre, often working the afternoon/evening shift. Danilo lives with his 17-year-old partner in a house he owns – his parents built it for him at the family's yard. His partner finished secondary school and started working in a store at a recently opened mall. Danilo is a young boy who is following “the right path” in life: he finished secondary school, started working and got into a serious relationship. The young couple is now responsible for their house, although they get regular help from their families. Now, they are saving to make their home more comfortable, as well as their life. Danilo's estimated monthly household income: 925 USD.

Eduarda and Elana are sisters. Their families live in three different households that share the same yard. Eduarda (42) is a single mother to a 21-year-old girl; her daughter

is a student and does not work yet. Eduarda is officially unemployed, though she works sporadically as a fisherwoman and craftswoman. She still performs traditional forms of fishing and does traditional artisanal work with shells and fish bones. Due to her knowledge about the region's ecosystem and cultural traditions – fishermen communities are characterized as traditional communities in Brazil – Eduarda occasionally contributes to social projects supported by companies in Cabo Frio. Eduarda's estimated monthly household income: 290 USD (plus irregular help from extended family).

Elana (41) is a mother of three boys aged two, nine and 14 years old respectively. She works as a self-employed sales person and is still registered as a fisherwoman, her previous occupation. She lives with her children and husband, who is a carpenter and freelancer waiter. Once a year, Elana and Eduarda put up a tent at the local community mussel festival, where they cook and sell traditional local food. Elana's estimated monthly household income: 2,310 USD.

The manicurist Jenifer (40) is originally from a rural area in the mountainous region of the State, where she grew up. She has lived in Cabo Frio for twelve years and works as manicurist in a small beauty salon. Jenifer lives with her second husband; he is a helper at a local office and works sporadically frying burgers in a cafeteria. The couple do not have children, but Jenifer has a son from her previous marriage. Her son is independent and lives in the capital.

Jenifer had a poor and simple lifestyle in her youth, but a shift in her economic situation came about when she started working. This allowed her to be an independent woman. She considers herself a consumerist, and believes that it is part of being a modern woman. Moreover, Jenifer believes in working hard and as much as possible to buy more things that make her life comfortable and save her time, so than she can work even harder. She never had access to education and is therefore illiterate. Jenifer's estimated monthly household income: 660 USD.

Fernanda (45) has a visual imparity and has been losing her sight gradually since she was young. Thus, because of her special condition; she retired soon after working few years as a receptionist. Her four-year-old daughter has Down's syndrome, and her routine of daily treatments and stimulations demands Fernanda's full dedication. She is

married, but spends the weekdays at her parents' house and meets her husband only on weekends given the routine of treatments her daughter has to go through (her parents' house is close to the NGO, whilst the couple's house is in the outskirts of the city).

Fernanda's estimated monthly household income: 1,040 USD

João (45) works as a doorkeeper; he is married and has two children, a 21-year-old girl and a 16-year-old boy. He lives together with his children and his wife, who is a housewife. João's daughter works as a helper at a supermarket and contributes to the household income. João has an interesting profile in which concerns the Brazilian identity and it was hard to get specific statements about his perceptions of his everyday life, given his optimism – he kept saying he is always satisfied with what life brings to him. João is a happy man and repeatedly says that one should always see the positive side of everything. João's estimated monthly household income: 825 USD.

Maria (46) is a housewife and her 21-year-old son is handicapped. Her husband is a Portuguese-English teacher at three of the local public schools. Maria does not have a formal job, but she believes it is important to be financially independent from her husband. Thus, she makes her money in the informal market, selling clothes, jewellery and perfumes and working for her brother in his bar on weekends. Maria's estimated monthly household income: 1,650 USD.

Marinalva (52) is a single mother of two and a housewife. Her daughter (19) is studying to be a physiotherapist at a local private university while working part time as a helper in their neighbourhood's kindergarten. Marinalva's 15-year-old son is handicapped and demands her full attention. Because of his condition, the family is entitled to one minimum wage social benefit. After her son was victim of medical malpractice and became mental disabled, Marinalva's ex-husband started drinking and became violent against her and their children. As her family owned the house in which they lived at the time, she told him to leave after a violent episode and he never returned.

Marinalva is the poorest person I have interviewed, her family lives on the social benefit income and on external help from institutions and extended family. Although their financial situation is not comfortable, Marinalva considers herself happy and blessed to have a beautiful family and supportive friends, who are always there for her when

needed. Marinalva's estimated monthly household income: 290 USD (plus irregular help from extended family).

Sheila (63) was my first interviewee. She works as a maid four times a week in a family's house and as a cleaner occasionally. Her grandson Carlos (21) lives with her in a sublet house. He works as a burger fryer in a cafeteria at their neighbourhood. Sheila is a widow, she and her husband had three children; two of her children passed away, and she receives pensions from both her son and her husband. Sheila's estimated monthly household income: 950 USD.

Sara (56) works as a maid in an upper class family's house. She shares her household with her only daughter's family. Her daughter is a housewife, has a four-year-old son and Sara's son-in-law works formally as a helper and informally as a mason. They are building a second house on the same yard as Sara's, and they intend to move soon. Sara never mentioned what happened to her daughter's father. She had a poor and hard childhood in the rural district of Cabo Frio; she never had access to education and is therefore illiterate. Sara's estimated monthly household income: 990 USD.

Jurema (55) is a housewife and works informally selling perfumes and scents. She lives with her husband, who is also a salesperson, and their 22-year-old twins. The family lives in a simple rented house, and her sons recently got their first jobs – one works as an inspector at a college and the other as a cashier in a supermarket. Her family is Evangelic Christian and she is very religious. Hence, it was hard for her to separate her faith and the way she perceives the world. She never complains about the things she has, or about life. Even when she recognizes she has a hard life, Jurema is still thankful for all the good sides of it. Jurema's estimated monthly household income: 500 USD.

Ludimila (27) lives with her husband, her two-year-old daughter and her sister. She used to work in a pastry factory, but she stopped after her daughter was born. Ludimila intends to get back to the market as soon as possible, as she took technical-vocational courses on cosmetics and wants to start a new carrier. Her husband is a bus driver at the local transportation company. Despite her young age, she had the opportunity to experience a rural lifestyle in Cabo Frio during her childhood, as her grandmother was a peasant and had a small ranch. Ludimila has been living in the same neighbourhood her entire life, and has seen it changing, getting bigger, busier and more dangerous over the

course of her life. Ludimila's estimated monthly household income: 760 USD (plus irregular help from extended family).

4.2.2 Family composition and roles

The number of people composing a family and the role each member plays on it can influence how people perform their tasks in the everyday life, and may affect the way they buy and use things. Thus, those are significant facts for this study. With that in mind, I have analysed the composition and roles of my informants' families and have examined this information alongside secondary data in order to understand the situations I found relevant to the bigger picture. It is interesting to see how conjunctural changes are affecting the families and vice versa, as I will show.

Regarding the number of family members, it is interesting to note how it varies among my informants according to age groups. My eldest informant, Julia had nine children, whilst middle-aged João has only two. The young Ludimila has an only daughter and is still sceptical about having a second child. Danilo said he was born to be a father, although his 17-year-old partner does not want to be a mother anytime soon.

The examples mentioned above illustrate the changes that have occurred over time concerning the composition of the Brazilian families, but also give an idea about people's expectations for the future. As stated by Julia, she did not have much choice about the number of children she and her husband had. At the time when she was a young woman, the struggles were many for the poor and she never had access to information on birth control or family planning.

Today, family planning is included in public policies, public and private schools teach sexual education and health centres are equipped to provide information, contraceptive pills and medical care (MDS 2015). It is true that the birth rate among the poor is still slightly higher than among the rich, but according to a recently released research by IBGE (CartaCapital 2015), this scenario is changing and Brazilian families are becoming smaller in general:

The study shows that the number of children per family has dropped 10,7% in a ten year period in Brazil, wherein among the 20% poorest inhabitants the index registered was 15,7%. (...) In 2003, the average number of children per family in

Brazil was 1,78. In 2013, the number was 1,59. Among the poorest, the averages registered were 2,55 and 2,15 respectively.²³

Hence, the study shows the efficiency of public policies targeting birth-rate control. It also evidences that family planning is a possibility for all in Brazil today.

On the other hand, the family roles have not changed much so far. Gender still determines the division of work, despite the fact women have increased their presence in the labour market. Men are educated to be the household “providers” and do not perform housework. As I extensively explain in subsection 4.3.1, sexism is determinant in Brazilians’ routines. Hence, the role of women is to be responsible for the household tasks, children and cleanliness. Men are responsible for managing the family income and seem to have major power in deciding about purchasing goods.

As said by Danilo, he and his wife only bought a washing machine after she started working outside the house. Before purchasing the washing machine, however, they bought a new TV set to improve Danilo’s gaming experience. Another example comes from Jurema’s family, though she is an independent salesperson like her husband, Jurema works less hours than he does due to the housework she must carry out. Consequently, her income is considerably lower than her husband’s, which gives him more power to decide on the family spending, according to her.

Similar to Jurema, João, Maria, Fernanda and Ludimila live with their spouses and children. João’s 21-year-old daughter is already working and contributing to the family’s income. João mentioned she is saving money to pay for a graduate course at the local private university, and she wants to get back to her studies as soon as possible. Danilo lives with his partner and they both work in the formal market, but she is the only one responsible for the housework. The young couple has no children yet.

Elana and Jenifer live with their second husbands. Elana has three children, wherein the eldest from her previous marriage and the youngest is her sister’s son, who is being fostered by her because of his mother’s health circumstances – Elana’s sister is addicted to crack and is not able to raise the two-year-old boy. Jenifer has no children on her current relationship. Her only son is already independent from her and lives in Rio.

²³ Statement translated from Portuguese.

Sara is also divorced and shares her house with her daughter's family; José, her son-in-law, is building an independent apartment on the second floor where the couple intends to live in the future with their son. For now, they all share the common areas of Sara's house. Sara and José are responsible for the family's expenses, as her daughter has stopped working since her grandson was born. Despite working fulltime, Sara still contributes to the housework.

Moreover, there are families relying only on women as the head of the household. According to the national households' survey PNAD (UOL 2012), women are responsible for 37% of the Brazilian households, and 88,7% of these families rely on a single mother. This is the case of Marinalva, Sheila and Eduarda, whom for different reasons became the only ones responsible for their households. Sexism also has an influence on this matter: as looking after the family and the household typically falls under a woman's domain, men usually take more risks. Examples of this include Sheila's husband, who was murdered after being involved in criminal activities – or Marinalva's ex-husband who simply decided to abandon the family after their second children acquired a special mental condition. Eduarda did not tell me her story, but she mentioned being a divorcee and having a 21-year-old daughter.

These women struggle to work outside and/or in the household in order to afford a minimum life standard for their families. Sheila's children left her house a long time ago, and two of her three children have already passed away. Yet, Sheila financially supports her daughter when she is struggling. One of her grandsons lives at her house and relies on her to pay for the household expenses and to perform the household tasks. Although she is now officially retired, Sheila still works permanently as a maid and occasionally as a cleaner to increase her income.

Eduarda used to be a fisherwoman, but she could no longer rely on the unstable income the activity provides. Therefore, she took a technical-vocational course and worked for a while in the local airport, until she was fired in April 2013. Since then, she has been working informally as fisherwoman, artesian worker and contributing to social programmes.

Marinalva has not worked outside the household since her son was born. Her family is financially dependent on the social benefits they are entitled to given her son's special

condition. The pension is equivalent to one minimum wage – 260.04 USD (MTE 2015) – and the money is not enough to support her and her two children. To afford food and to pay for the monthly bills, Marinalva budgets for every purchase as well as electricity and water expenditure. In addition, she counts on her brother and her daughter to help her with extra expenses and emergencies, and on the institution APAE – previously mentioned in section 2.3 – to acquire free medicines and treatments for her son. She stated that it is impossible for her to go back to the labour market since her son is fully dependent on her.

4.3 Aspects affecting consumption

After introducing my informants, it is possible to move forward into a deeper comprehension of consumption phenomena. In this section, I present some of the cultural traits and agents of consumption I identify as relevant in influencing the new consumers' behaviours. The cultural and social influences over practices and therefore over consumption are a given according to SPT. As argued by Harold Wilhite (2013, 69), "(...) agency in consumption is distributed among bodies, technologies and social contexts".

Accordingly, in the sense of social contexts, the analysis of identities and cultural background of Brazilian society – particularly concerning the poor – is imperative to understand the consumption phenomena described in the present study. Using data and perceptions from the field to guide my rationale, I drew the following analysis employing secondary sources to validate my predictions.

Hereafter, I present some intrinsic values from Brazil – tacit social norms or conventions – humbleness and gender related issues, which I found relevant for this study's analysis, considering the data I have acquired during fieldwork as well as my personal experiences as a local.

Furthermore, I draw a picture of the Brazilian media, relating its peculiarities and persuasive features, and finally, I relate the roles of the three actors I found relevant in shaping consumption practices among the low classes: the media, the government/industry and the retailers, which I call the triad.

After understanding these influential factors and in which way they relate to the SPT dimensions, it will be possible to grasp the specific social, cultural and infrastructural complexity where the *Cabofrienses* new consumers are located.

4.3.1 Intrinsic values

Joseph Rouse (2007, 502) states that a society is a domain of activities and institutions which are organized by rules or actions according to norms. Belonging to the sociality sphere of SPT, tacit norms or conventions can be understood as a pool of unspoken norms that are present in social groups and affect its individuals' actions and practices, thus affecting consumption behaviour.

Intrinsic values are traditional norms that, although not officially recognized as laws or rules, have an impact over the social group with consequences to its individuals' everyday lives. Hence, I found it crucial to investigate thoroughly such values in order to understand the complexity of my findings and thus make conclusions over them. Hereafter, I present the two intrinsic values that persistently arose in my interviews, and which I believe have power to influence people's choices and perceptions.

Humbleness

What I have named as humbleness is a cluster of values that have been rooted amongst Brazilian society since colonial times. It is directly related to a hierarchically ordered society, based on racial prejudice against the black and the mixed races – which since colonial times have been the poor. By humbleness, I mean an inferiority complex combined with a sense of thankfulness for anything acquired in life, even when one's achievements were acquired at the cost of hard work.

As stated by Miranda (2002, 02) about the construction of Brazilian culture during the colonial times: “The society dominated by the landowners absorbs the ideas of race hierarchy and the exclusion of the poor and the black of an oligarchic, proslavery, feudal and capitalist society. Later, these interests forge the notion of Brazilian Culture”²⁴. Over these hierarchical pillars, humbleness was shaped as the way the black and the poor found to interact with the “superior” white and rich. The tacit norms

²⁴ Statement translated from Portuguese.

persisted over time and were enhanced by the “scientific racism” of the end of the 19th century (Naxara 1998, 11-12).

Granting that hierarchical structures are no longer official, this way of thinking and organizing relationships is very much present within the Brazilian society of today. It is seen as “natural” that the poor pay respect to white upper class individuals only because of their social status. Likewise, it is still considered “natural” to have mixed race or black people performing minimum wage-jobs in service to the rich – for instance, a middle class family member considers inappropriate to his/her social position to clean his/her own house. Therefore, occupations such as maids, housekeepers and doorkeepers are quite popular in Brazil and manpower is generally devalued, particularly when it is not formally qualified.

The rooting of humbleness in the Brazilian identity can be observed in the book *Estrangeiro em sua própria terra: representações do brasileiro, 1870/1920*²⁵, where Márcia Regina C. Naxara (1998) investigates passages of Brazilian literary productions from 1870 to 1920 with the purpose of identifying what aspects have helped to shape the identity of the Brazilian people during the period surrounding the abolition of slavery – which occurred in 1888²⁶. In the course of the book, the values constituting humbleness are mentioned several times as characteristics of the *caipiras* and *caboclos*.

Caipira is a label given to the land workers, usually mixed race or black and poor. They are described as illiterate, ignorant, lazy and are even accused of being a plague to the land – although the ones labelled as *caipiras* were usually labourers who had their manpower exploited by the landlords after the slaves were freed. *Caboclo* is the term for the mixture between white and indigenous, but it is also employed in a pejorative way to generalize any mixed race land worker, with similar attributes to the *caipira*.

The disqualification of the rural men became common sense. The image of the *caipira* as ignorant, lazy, incapable etc., generalized to the poor urban population. Both were seen as an evidence of underdevelopment, for which it was recommended educative and disciplinary measures (...) The representation of the Brazilian people tended to cover the poor part of the population in a way that attributes of indolence, laziness, ignorance and lack of preparation to a ‘civilized’

²⁵ Translates to: Foreigner in its own land: representations of the Brazilian [people], 1870/1920.

²⁶ According to the Brazilian Federal Law number 3.353, signed in May 13th 1888.

life became the remarkable features of the Brazilian people as a whole (ibid., 117).²⁷

The pejorative image related to race and to social status which was politically useful during the slavery times, proved to be useful after abolition as well, allowing the exploitation of the unprivileged by the white elite to persist. Convincing the mass of its flaws and incapability has attested to be an efficient way to control it, justifying and “concealing” the discrimination (DaMatta 1984, 37-39).

Furthermore, Christian values helped straighten the humbleness tacit norm. Christianity has provided roots for Brazilian culture since the beginning of the colonization times. Brought to the country by the Portuguese, Catholicism is still strong in Brazil; the biggest catholic country in the world. Brazil has 123 million believers, accounting for 64,6% of the total inhabitants. In 1872, when the first census was conducted in the country, 99,7% of the population was Catholic (Jornal Nacional 2013).

Ideas like “work dignifies the men” and that everyone should be thankful for whatever situation they face in life are still present in the Brazilian mentality: one should not complain about financial problems when one is healthy, for example. Having a job – whatever job and payment it gives – and being physically and mentally capable to performing it is considered a gift. Complaining about a tough job or a bad wage can be seen as a blasphemy and a lack of consideration to the gifts one receives.

The Christian values helped to enhance the humbleness tacit norms over time. The popular song *Deixa a vida me levar* – roughly translates to something like “Let it be” and is not a religious song, but a *samba* – illustrates well the concept of humbleness and how it relates to religion. It says:

I have been through all things in this life / [but] I am still waiting for my turn to have a roof over my head / My origins are poor, I confess / but my heart is noble / That is how God made me / Let it be (...) / I am happy and I give thanks for everything God gave to me (...) / All I can do is raise my hands to the sky / Thank and be faithful / To the destiny God has given me/ If don't have all I need, with what I have I live / Slowly, here I go! / (...) and in fits and starts, here I go! / I am happy and I thank for all God gave to me (Pagodinho, Meriti, and Cais 2002).²⁸

²⁷ Statement translated from Portuguese.

²⁸ Statement translated from Portuguese

This song illustrates how humbleness plays an important role in building conformism on the one hand, but also has a part in building happiness on the other, as mentioned in the song. About conformism and social illusions among the Brazilian society, the philosopher Marilena Chauí (1995, 174) states:

The ideological production of social illusion aims to the acceptance of all social classes to the conditions they live in, judging these conditions as natural, normal, correct, fair, without attempting to change them or to know them genuinely, without taking into account that there is a deep contradiction between the actual conditions in which we live and ideologies.²⁹

Therefore, ideological productions have the function of regulating social systems, ensuring the unprivileged conform and accept their role in society whilst empowering the privileged to preserve their social standards. It may seem like a fragile system, but historical and cultural features strengthen the power of ideologies as can be clearly observed in the Brazilian society of today.

Although an official apartheid never existed in Brazil, racial segregation is still prevalent in the country. To mention an example, workers were not allowed until quite recently to use what is called the “social” entryway in residential buildings. In Brazil, it is common that buildings have two separate entrances – the “social”, a front door that is designed for dwellers, and the “service”, a rough access designated to transport furniture and maintenance equipment, also used by the dwellers when in wet clothes in seaside towns and when transiting with animals. Despite its original purposes, the “service” entryway and elevator used to be also designated for house workers – it being their only route to access the apartments – hence the dwellers would not need to share the lobby and elevators with workers.

Segregation and prejudice were already repudiated by the official legislation since 1988 – the Brazilian Federal Constitution states that all citizens are equal and have the same rights³⁰ – however in practice, hierarchical tacit norms were stronger in that case. Therefore, since the 90’s, several municipalities all over the country have created specific laws based on the Federal Constitution’s paragraph in order to regulate the use

²⁹ Statement translated from Portuguese

³⁰ The guarantee of equal rights for all is stated in the fifth paragraph of The Brazilian Federal Constitution from 1988.

of different entries and elevators, inhibiting the discriminatory practices. Nevertheless, cases of segregation are still recurrent in residential buildings – else in common spaces – but punitive measures are applied to the criminals and the understanding of what is “right” and what is “wrong” is gradually changing.

As an intrinsic value, humbleness is complex and subjective. In my interviews, I have noticed the influence of humbleness many times on people’s statements, but especially in their expressions and body language. The first sign of it came in the beginning of nearly every interview, when my informants would question why I was interested in talking to them and not with “important” people: “Do you want to talk to the poor? I do not have anything interesting to say”, said Jenifer. Jurema and João insisted they would not be able to answer correctly to my questions, even before I had the chance to explain my research to them. For that reason, I had to explain and convince my informants that they were the targets of my study and that their statements were of my main interest.

In the middle of the interviews, when I started asking about their purchases, practices and houses, many have used their “inferior” social status to explain the lack of an appliance or the poor infrastructure of their houses. For instance, when asked about her plans on buying new appliances, Julia answered negatively and justified why she could not think about buying new appliances, though I have not asked for a justification:

Because my health is not good now, and I do not like to put my hands where I cannot reach. I am old already, and I do not want to create debts that my children will have to pay. They [her children] have their own families, their own lives. Besides, I thank God for the help my children give me, paying for my medicines. The medicines are expensive, and my children help me buying them.

From Julia’s statement, it is possible to notice that she is thankful for having helpful family members, as well as for what she already has acquired in life until now. She does not think it is fair to aspire for more, given her age and social condition. By repeating the statement “I do not like to put my hands where I cannot reach”, Julia makes clear how aware she is about her “unprivileged” social position. Equally, Jurema is a strong believer and she cannot associate any accomplishment she had in her life with another factor than God. Jurema is thankful for what she has, even though her family struggles to pay the house rent and bills.

Although Fernanda tried to show how proud she was of her family's achievements, she could not escape from expressing humbleness in her statements. When asked about the house where she lives with her husband and daughter, Fernanda employed a language that showed how she feels about it, being diminutive in her description: "It is a good 'little house'". Little house, or *casinha* here does not imply for small space, but for its simplicity or for "a poor person's house", as she alleged.

On the contrary, the house described by Fernanda seems to be quite big, but as she and her husband built the house, she could not describe it differently from something simpler. Besides, she emphasizes the effort put in their house, accounting for money and work, to build it as it is now. At the same time, she reinforces it is not ready yet, and a lot of money and endeavour must still be dedicated to it until it becomes something more than a *casinha*.

It is not simple to translate into a text the way humbleness transpires in people's discourses and their mannerisms, given its subjectivity. While some of my informants' statements may expose features of humbleness, I could grasp its persistence in voice tones and gestures over every interview I conducted. I hope I have clarified the origins and structures of humbleness and how entrenched it is in the Brazilian identity, in particular in the identity of the poor. To be knowledgeable of this identity feature is crucial for understanding the new consumers' mind-set, thus their dispositions.

Gender related issues

Gender was also an ever-present issue that emerged in my interviews, and as with humbleness, its implications had a direct effect on peoples' practices and on the way they consume and use products. To illustrate my point, I draw on the research conducted in Zanzibari rural villages over more than a decade by Tanja Winther.

Winther investigated the situation of the villages at two different points in time, before and after the installation of an electricity network. Before the installation, the researcher collected information about peoples' wishes regarding electric appliances. Ten years after the grid was in place, Winther returned to the field to see if peoples' expectations had become reality. She found out that the electric appliances that were most desired by women and that would probably enhance their quality of life had not been consumed at

the previously expected rates. Further, she understood that the facts influencing the consumption behaviour in Zanzibar were a consequence of gender implications related to the locals' religious background and traditions (Winther 2007).

Gender inequality is a historical issue still present in modern society all over the world. In Brazil, the 1988 Federal Constitution was the first legislation to mention specifically gender equality before the law. Earlier, there were no regulations regarding women's equal rights in the country. In fact, 1916's Civil Code – an attempt to substitute the outdated Portuguese laws that were still in use in Brazil at the time – established the man as the family's head. The husband was the only one responsible for determining where his wife and children should live, administering the couples' equity and authorizing his wife to carry out a professional activity outside the household. The legislation hindered women from achieving personal independency and obligated men to protect and financially provide for the family (Marques and Melo 2008, 468-469).

Women's rights started to be discussed and were included in legislation in the 30's after feminist movements gained power and representation. The 1934 Constitution text included women's rights mostly with regard to labour regulation with many provisos and rights for voting (ibid., 471-472). The conservative regulations from the past were based on conversant values very much connected to the Catholic culture previously mentioned. This conservatism was reinforced during the years of dictatorial government, sustaining the organization of a sexist society, which persists today.

Nowadays, women are still educated differently than men, with moral values and expectations attached to their attitudes, bodies and sexuality. There is a clear division between female and male spheres in society: boys are raised to be providers and virile. They should not show feelings of weakness and they are socially allowed to have a free sexual life. Conversely, girls are taught to be responsible and to pitch in housework while boys are usually not.

Similar to Winther's research, my analysis over the material collected in the field made me believe that gender related issues in Cabo Frio have a strong power in affecting purchases of electric and electronic goods, as I attempt to clarify hereupon the particular circumstances I heard during the interviews.

The first case is that of Sara. She is illiterate as a result of her father's choice in not allowing his daughters to attend school, which was considered by him "a boys' thing". Sara grew up in a community in Cabo Frio's rural district and, according to her, her father's position was similar to the other men in their village at the time. I observed that Sara was not comfortable with telling me her story, and she tried to ascribe the cause of the circumstance to the social environment and not to personify it using her father.

Jenifer has a similar history. Like Sara, she never attended school and thus is illiterate. She also comes from a rural village, but from a town in the mountainous region of the State. Although I suspect Jenifer had been through a similar situation as Sara's, she did not disclose why she never studied – I felt from Jenifer's tone of voice that she was embarrassed, so I did not press her further.

When asked about her life standard now compared to the past, Jenifer mentioned the word "happier" four times in four statements. While she stated that the rhythm of her life has accelerated in comparison to 20 years ago, Jenifer considers herself happier now. She relates her current condition as a manicurist with freedom and dynamism, but recognizes she used to have a more tranquil life as a housewife.

Nonetheless, in the past, Jenifer depended financially on her first husband and did not have freedom of choice, as she voiced. Jenifer did not go into detail about her relationship with her ex-husband. She had highlighted how important work is in her life, and how willing she is to work more in order to improve her lifestyle.

However, the situation experienced by Sara and Jenifer seems to have changed among the young generations in Cabo Frio. Consistent with secondary data collected in the municipality (Figure 8), women's school attendance rates are higher, and men are more likely to dropout earlier than women are, as the following graphs show.

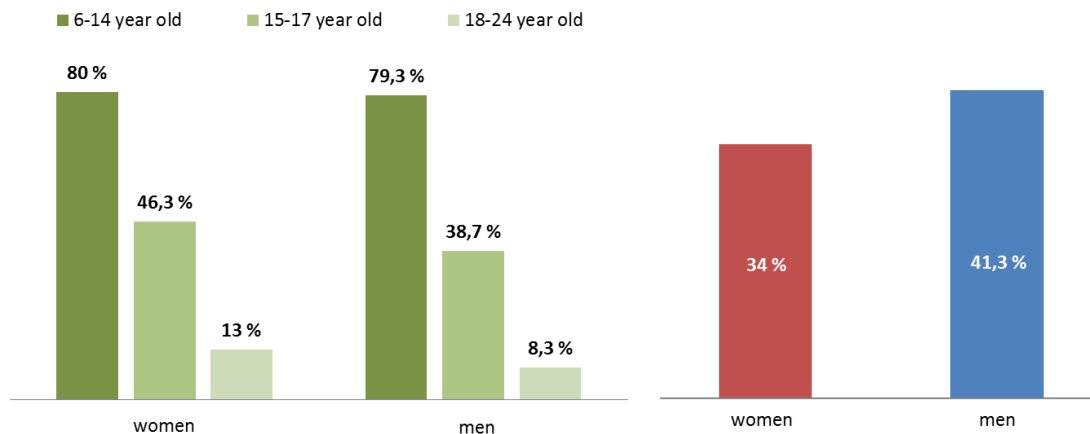


Figure 8: School attendance rate (left); Precocious school dropout rate among 18-24 year-old students (right). Source: IBGE (2014c)

The reasons that led to this happening are still unclear, but it may be that men have tacit responsibility to provide financially for their families. The necessity to commence work at early ages may dishearten them from studying longer. Only 850 men are attending higher education in the city, against 1380 women, a difference of 38,4%.

In Cabo Frio, as generally in Brazil, the household is still a feminine arena. When asked about household appliances, the men I have interviewed said only their wives could answer or attempted to justify their lack of knowledge. Women, on the other hand, could answer these questions, but some had problems answering questions concerning costs and expenses, even if they were contributing actively to the family's income. Besides, household appliances are still perceived as luxuries to the women: "We have bought her a washing machine. The poor girl was getting exhausted by washing our clothes in the semi-automatic washer³¹. She had to twist it all by hand", stated Danilo about his partner's domestic duties. On the words of Danilo, after his partner started working outside of the house, they decided to buy the new washing machine for her and a new motorcycle for him.

Driven by a similar mentality, Fernanda told me what a good person her husband is because sometimes he manages to do his laundry during the week – using the washing machine to wash his own clothes – when she is out of town accompanying her daughter

³¹ The semi-automatic washer, known in Brazil as *tanquinho*, is a simpler and cheaper washing machine that washes clothes but does not have washing programs, temperature variations or centrifugation functions. It demands the user's full attention during the washing process to change the water in the appliance. Additionally, it requires the user's effort to rub (before and during washing) and to twist the clothes by hand (after washing).

in her treatments' routine. Fernanda is thankful for having an attentive husband, who copes with the household tasks and gives her and their daughter kindness. To illustrate her point, Fernanda used her sister's relationship as an example, telling me how her sister had to stop working and dedicated her life to her children: "She is mother and father at the same time". Her brother-in-law on the other hand "does not have time or willingness to be with his kids."

Additionally, as cleaning and cooking are part of women's responsibilities in Brazil, the introduction of the Brazilian food habits and cleanliness standards is vital to the understanding of many of my informants' statements and the analysis that will follow.

The traditional Brazilian meal contains four to five different elements, where rice and beans are staple side dishes served daily, accompanied by a meat dish, a raw salad and cooked or fried vegetables. A big warm meal is commonly served for lunch around noon and, in some households, for dinner as well. Breakfast typically consists of simple and light meals, usually composed by white bread spread with butter, fruits or juice, coffee and milk. Lunch hours are traditionally spent with the family, especially on Sundays, when extended family also participates on the meal.

It used to be common for men to go back home from work to have lunch with their family (the Brazilian labour law reserves a minimum of an unpaid hour for lunch time in an eight-hour working day), but urban lifestyle is progressively changing and the increasing size of the cities and traffic jams contribute to change this habit. Besides, because the women are working outside the house, the preparation of food during daytime is impossible. Homemade freshly prepared food is generally appreciated and for those who cannot return home from work to eat lunch, they would typically search for restaurants that serve *comida caseira* (food homemade-style).

It is also a woman's responsibility to maintain the house, her body and the children's bodies to be clean. Cleanliness is an important issue to Brazilian culture, and the standards set are high. For instance, a Brazilian home should always be tidy and clean, even when visitors are not expected. To do so, women usually clean the kitchen, the toilets and sweep the floor of every room in the house on a daily basis. Additionally, intensive housecleaning is performed once a week at least.

It is expected that people brush their teeth three times a day, after every meal, and shower no less than two times, as body odour is socially unacceptable. Moreover, cleanliness is used as a factor to assess the ability of a wife or daughter to carry out duties as a housewife – even when the household relies on a maid, it is the woman's responsibility to control and manage the maid's work, ensuring the house will be as tidy as possible and reaffirming her role as a competent housewife.

The intrinsic values previously exposed were a constant in my interviews and observations, and account for a part of the Brazilian new consumers' mind-set. That mind-set is determinant in people's wishes, aspirations and daily practices, thus, the explanations are indispensable to the understanding of the analysis described here and the ones that are presented in the following sections.

4.3.2 Brazilian media, the smooth operator

“How can we deny the influence of television, present in almost every [Brazilian] household, on the formation of social identities?”³² (Barros 2015) The idea presented by the Brazilian journalist and critique of the local media Marcos Barros is the starting point of this analysis, and his main argument can be confirmed by secondary data: The TV set is the appliance with the highest presence in Brazil, where 97% of total households have a TV set, against 51% with washing machines (IBGE 2015). How rational is it that a consumer chooses to prioritize the acquisition of TV set rather than a washing machine, an appliance that would save one's time and effort in the performance of everyday tasks?

The gender division of labour explained in the previous section is part of the answer to this question, as washing machines are appliances that directly benefit women, by saving their time and effort. As I mentioned before, the purchase decision is still a man's prerogative, as they are the ones earning more money, while women are still the ones responsible for the housework. Apart from that, there are other social aspects influencing consumption behaviour. To understand better the Brazilian household scenario, it is crucial to consider the social aspects of owning a TV set.

³² Statement translated from Portuguese.

As stressed by Barros (2015), “The media influences people in the act of speaking, thinking and even in the way they dress. It creates demands, guides the society’s customs and habits, and defines styles, catchphrases and social discussions”³³. For instance, without a TV set one is unable to follow football matches, daily telenovelas and the influences set by them. Thus, one is unable to keep up or make small talk with colleagues, friends or neighbours.

Brazil has a strong local media structure, which includes the 17th biggest media company in the world, the Globo group³⁴ (ZenithOptimedia 2013). According to The Economist (2014a), the daily audience reached by the TV channel Globo in Brazil – about 91million people – is only attained in the United States once a year, and only by a single network, the one which wins the rights to broadcast the American football Super Bowl championship game that year. Globo’s great audience is subjected to its homonymous open TV station, which displays three soap operas – or telenovelas – six day per week. The group “monopoly” over Brazilian media system attracts brands, which pay fortunes to advertise and place their products in Globo’s shows and telenovelas (ibid.).

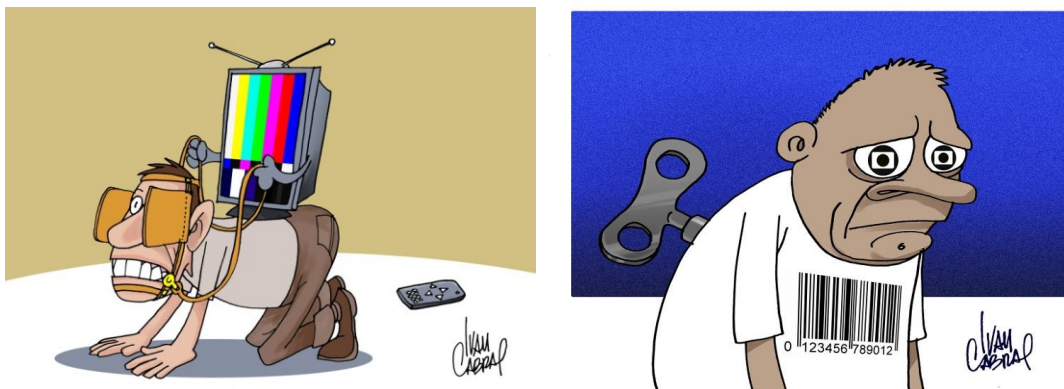


Figure 9: Political illustrations showing the power of media and the power of Globo (the logo in the man’s eyes, in the right) in manipulating and standardizing people’s opinions and actions. Source and copyright: Ivan Cabral (2010)

The political illustrations by Ivan Cabral above (Figure 9) portray the power of Brazilian media to manipulate people’s behaviours and minds. Particularly, the power

³³ Statement translated from Portuguese.

³⁴ The Globo group counts on broadcast network, pay-tv stations, magazines, radio, film production and newspapers (Economist 2014a)

of Globo group over determining people's lifestyles and consumption choices is obvious; given its enormous reach in the country through various media formats. As one can observe when in Brazil, a brand, a product or even a song that is placed in a telenovela instantly become popular among the viewers, and a success in sales.

As a Brazilian, I cannot count the number of times salespeople have offered me products by arguing "It's just the same as that used in a particular telenovela now. You must have it!" This is what influences most people do to keep up with social norms and patterns, acquiring things that communicate they are "in" with the current trends, set by the telenovelas and TV shows. This consumption behaviour can easily be observed in Brazilian streets.

Examples of this phenomenon can be clearly observed within the clothing and fashion industry. When I was in the field, there was a specific type of shorts – I found out it was called shorts-skirt origami – I observed girls wearing it everywhere in town. I was quick to deduce that it was telenovela fever, and I found out with the help of Brazilian friends it was placed in a telenovela that had just finished running. One of the characters, a "trendy girl", was wearing it consistently throughout the episodes; consequently, the shorts became popular among girls who wished to portray themselves as that telenovela character – a fashion trend setter who was up-to-date/modern, beautiful, young and rich.

This case can be analysed throughout social performance, which comprises the sociality element of SPT. Members – or prospects – of a given social group reinforce their current or desired social position by displaying symbolic objects – wearing specific types of shorts, in this case – that indirectly "communicate" their current or desired position/status to society. The short-skirt origami is an example of what repeatedly happens in Brazil as a result of products placed in highly rated telenovelas and TV shows.

As my informant Marinalva expressed, after she bought a TV set she was able to keep up with trends. Products rapidly become desired and the "fever" only stops with the conclusion of the telenovela that launched the given product and the beginning of a new telenovela placing something else that subsequently set a new trend.

It is not news that the media is powerful in influencing people's choices all over the world. However, given the peculiarities of Brazilian media and its bold social role, the power of media seems to be increased in the country. Therefore, the acknowledgement of the Brazilian media profile and its role as an important factor influencing consumption is needed for this study.

Desire, taboos and machines

The media's influence in people's consumption behaviour is not restricted to fashion and clothing. As I was particularly interested in durable goods and domestic appliances, I tried, while in the field, to observe the attention that media, especially Globo, was giving to these appliances. As expected, I found – both from secondary data and in my interviews – that after about a decade of discredit, the washing machine finally became an item of desire for Brazilian families. With the support of the media building positive images and values around it, the washing machine gained Brazilians' attention and became a desired item, going beyond the consumers' rational minds. Conversely, the dishwasher remains an unpopular item among Brazilians.

During an interview, the maid Sheila stated that she considers the washing machine to be the most life-changing appliance she has ever acquired given its timesaving and effort-saving attributes. When I asked why she did not acquire a washing machine before 2004 – she won a used washing machine from her boss at the time – Sheila told me she would not spend her money to buy it because she never believed a machine could wash clothes better than she could. After the acquisition of her first washing machine, Sheila finally accepted the appliance:

I always thought the washing machine did not wash or did not remove the dirt from clothes properly. I used to say I would never have one. Once I got my first washing machine from my boss, I put a pair of dirty denim pants in it and I saw that it was washed. Then I said: – Now I am glad to have a washing machine!

Just like owning a washing machine a decade ago, today there are many taboos³⁵ that surround owning a dishwasher, such as its inefficiency in properly cleaning the dishes and that it is water and energy intensive. Additionally, the dishwasher lacks attributes of

³⁵ I employ the meaning of taboo as “social conventions and regulations of a negative sort” (Radcliffe-Brown 1945, 440).

the materiality element to stimulate its popularity, as usually there is no built infrastructure to install it in Brazilian houses – I myself gave up on acquiring one when I was living in Rio because of the lack of infrastructure at the apartment I used to rent. To install a dishwasher, it is highly likely that the consumer must renovate his/her kitchen.

Despite the unpopularity of the dishwasher, I saw some brand new models being offered in Cabo Frio's Casas Bahia³⁶, as well as being advertised in *O Globo* daily newspaper. After seeing the offers, I became more curious about the appliance. Some days later, coincidentally, I was waiting to approach Jenifer at the beauty salon where she works, when I noticed that a morning show on the TV was highlighting electrical household appliances.

In the TV show, specialists were talking about the maintenance, cleaning and use of microwave ovens, washing machines and the infamous dishwasher. These experts were trying to dispel the myths that surround each of the appliances by enhancing rational attributes they comprise. Particularly, the TV hosts were keen to demystify the taboo that the dishwasher was not efficient enough. They placed a camera inside it and showed live the process of dishwashing while another expert was commenting on it and solving doubts from the audience.

I took the opportunity given to me by the programme to ask the four women present at the beauty salon about their opinions on the dishwasher and, despite the reasonable arguments presented by the experts, the women surrounding me were not convinced; they still resisted believing in the dishwasher efficiency and said they would not invest their money in it.

This situation is an example that rational elements alone are not enough to change entrenched habits, therefore, other actions need to be put forward alongside rationality to fully persuade people. The simple fact that the media are depicting the dishwasher is already a step in its way to popularity, as TV programs work as well as vitrines for the industry – one does not necessarily buy everything one sees in a shop window, but he/she may start thinking about it and consider buying it in the future.

³⁶ Casas Bahia is a big retail chain, which is present all over the country. It sells all kinds of electric and electronic appliances, as well as furniture. Its business model is extensively explained in subsection 4.3.3.

It takes time and effort until the media and other players “convince” the consumers to acquire appliances that are not common in their everyday lives. The social and cultural aspects surrounding the dishwasher strongly affect its consumption profile. Yet again, washing the dishes is a task usually performed by women and maids. Thus, acquiring a dishwasher would initially benefit women and maids.

As stressed by the Brazilian sociologist Elisabeth Silva (2010, 28-29) in her article *Maids, machines and morality*, employers consider washing the dishes as a service already included in the roles of maids, and that maids are not intellectually equipped to operate dishwasher machines – some families have dishwashers to be used only during the weekends, when the maids are off duty. As maids’ salaries are relatively low and affordable and dishwashers are costly, the former still prevails in mid-upper class Brazilian households. Specifically, to upper class families, it is still cheaper and socially expected that human labour is employed as opposed to machines performing housekeeping tasks.

Regarding women, the argument that they do not have full agency over the family’s expenditure may be an option to understand this case. Moreover, the tacit social norms regarding cleanliness influence women’s choices. Accordingly, it may not be worth it for a female new consumer to prioritize an expensive appliance and still risk having unclean dishes and a tainted reputation.

Later at home, I investigated the material attributes of the dishwasher and how interested players in the market were circumventing the infrastructural matter. I found out that several new buildings around Brazil already contain the necessary structures to accommodate a dishwasher, and this information is included in their advertisement material, giving a clue for what is about to come.

The example shows how diverse factors might converge to make appliances such as the dishwasher more desirable. I cannot predict the future, but with new housing units’ scripts “asking” for a dishwasher, as they have the needed infrastructure in place, maids’ salaries getting higher and insistent stimulation from the media, it is possible that the dishwasher will be the next appliance on the wishing list of millions of Brazilians.

4.3.3 The triad

With reference to the “dishwasher case”, I had an intuition that there was more to be understood about the movement towards machines’ consumption. The mobilization of different actors from significant sectors such as media, construction companies, retail chains and industry was a clear sign of this movement. Analysing inputs from the media, advertisements, housing infrastructure and product availability, then crossing it with the economic policies from recent years, I realized that my hunch was well reasoned.

Similar to the Lula government’s policies during his presidential years regarding the automotive industry (Braathen and Kasahara 2015, 137-138), Dilma’s strategies place a focus on stimulating local industrial production. As Brazilian streets are today filled with cars and traffic jams are a problem even in small towns, the car lost the government efforts’ focus. In 2011, the first year of Dilma’s first mandate, the government abolished the IPI – the Brazilian taxation over industrialized products – over white goods produced in Brazil, and in 2014 again it was decided not to increase the IPI of these goods (Rios 2014).

The reduction in taxations aims to stimulate consumption and keep internal industrial activities stable, avoiding layoffs and economic instability. Additionally, much like Lula’s automotive industry strategy, the internal production of plastic and iron – which are Brazilian commodities – are also boosted by the white goods push, as essential raw materials to this industry (Sousa 2007, 56).

Consequently, the industry works at its highest capacity, flooding the market with products that must reach the consumers’ homes as fast as possible. That is when the retailers step into the story. In line with Sousa (ibid.), a major feature of the white goods’ sector is its subordination to the retailers’ demands. As the retailers are closer to the final consumers – and also given their powerful and massive structures, which will be later scrutinised – they have the power to collect and understand their consumer feedback.

The retailers therefore select the products they will and will not buy. Consequently, the white goods industry must rapidly respond, altering its production and developing new products to cope with the market’s demands. The relation between the industry and the

retailers are symbiotic; both need each other, and both use their power to increase their own profits.

It is not possible to talk about the retail sector in Brazil without mentioning its most famous and biggest player, the retail chain Casas Bahia (CB) – here employed to illustrate how powerful the retail sector is in Brazil. CB became known as the first brand to focus its sales to the poor in the country. Today, CB is rated as the most valued Brazilian retail brand by the Interbrand ranking³⁷, with an estimated value of 396 million USD.

In a time when credit lines were only a possibility for the wealthy, CB created a new business model after acquiring a mortgage company in the 70's (Casas Bahia 2015). The retailer offered credit through its own instalment plans – the so called *carnês* – with payment schedules spanning up to 15 month (Foguel and Wilson 2003, 7). Currently, the *carnês* are gradually being substituted by the chain's credit cards, which are offered to every customer, even to the ones with no proved income. CB's market strategy is internationally recognized as a benchmark in how to sell durable goods to the poor. The company has more than 650 physical stores spread over 18 different States and its online store delivers nationally (Casas Bahia 2015).



Figure 10: White goods displayed at a Casas Bahia store in Cabo Frio. Pictures: Marcela Oliveira Svoren.

The CB stores – such as the one pictured in Figure 10 – are spacious, well lighted and have high standards regarding interior design. The products are displayed side by side

³⁷ The Interbrand ranking is an international branding study performed by the Interbrand consulting company to evaluate brands' values and rates worldwide (Interbrand 2015).

under spotlights, appealing to the visitors. In addition to its merchandising appeals, CB was the country's second largest advertiser in 2014, with an investment of more than 1.4 billion USD in advertisements (Barbosa 2015). For that reason, it makes sense that the media channels, such as the ones in Globo group, are engaged in stimulating consumption of household equipment. To understand the media's role in influencing consumption in Brazil, please read subsection 4.3.2.

Finally, the triad is complete: public economic policies are focused on stimulating the internal metallurgical industry, consequently encouraging the internal consumption of white goods. The media is performing its part, demystifying taboos related to the appliances by rationally proving them wrong. Besides, by manipulating the social element, media players are conceptualizing consumption of machines as a mean to the modern life, hence, white goods appeal as desirable to the consumers. At last, the products are available to the consumers through affordable credit lines in accessible, appealing and numerous stores spread all over the country.

This chapter outlines the cultural and social backgrounds in which my informants are placed. Simultaneously, I presented the analysis of these backgrounds from the perspective of consumption phenomena. I believe it is essential to grasp clearly the roles of cultural traits and influential actors, hitherto described, in affecting consumption within the given segment of population. It is important that social and cultural features are taken into consideration in the interpretation of the consumption phenomena analysed throughout this study, ensuring its correct understanding.

Last of all, intrinsic values related to humbleness and gender division of labour influence the way people perceive the society in which they are placed and how they perform their roles in this society. Briefly reflecting on consumption, humbleness may drive people to consume less quality products, as well as to accept low quality services and not require warranties attached to products and services. Gender division of labour influences the priorities regarding which household appliance are acquired, as men hold more acquisition power and women are responsible for housework. The media is a powerful actor in influencing consumption and creating desire by manipulating the messages delivered to the audience, in line with its interests. Therefore, together with the other actors composing the triad, the media has the capacity to influence people's

perceptions, reinforce their social roles and to trigger actions – and consumption practices – that keep the system's engines rolling.

5 Perceiving consumption of private goods

As I have previously mentioned, the changes in consumption patterns are not my final point of interest, but how people perceive those changes vis-à-vis their everyday lives. However, to grasp their perceptions, an investigation into the shifting practices surrounding consumption and daily life is needed. Consistent with the rationale of the materiality sphere of SPT, every appliance has a script, meaning it carries with it scripts to introduce a set of practices to its users.

Recently introduced practices will modify the way the user performs old practices and possibly create new habits. By experiencing new practices and habits, the user will also suffer alterations in his/her perceptions of daily life, including his/her awareness of time and space. Thus, different perceptions may introduce new necessities and desires, provoking new acquisitions in a chain reaction.

New sets of practices and behaviours were brought to my informants by recently acquired appliances, altering the way they perform and perceive their everyday lives. I sought to find out what practices have changed as well as what their impressions of the changes were. In that sense, I would like to portray the subjective outcomes of my exploration, and what, in my opinion, turned out to be the most interesting findings of my fieldwork.

Further, I explore how my informants perceive those changes and their effects on their everyday lives. Finally, I investigate the “Brazilian ideal”, which seems to be the impact of these phenomena on the configuration of social dynamics.

5.1 Old, new and changing practices

In this section, I draw an analysis about the alterations of practices occasioned by the introduction of new appliances over time, according to my informants’ perceptions.

Assuming that things have scripts and bodies have experiential knowledge, together with newly acquired things come new practices. These practices can be consciously inserted in one’s everyday life – for instance, by acquiring a washing machine, one is

consciously choosing to change the way one performs the cleaning of one's clothes – but this is not necessarily true in every case.

The introduction of new practices may take a while to occur and can as well be unnoticed by the performer. One can purchase a smartphone with the intent of easing one's access to email and information while one is away from the PC. However, one might also use the smartphone as a leisure object to play games and access social media, changing the way one formerly acted during free time. Observe that the user did not necessarily plan for or expect the secondary use of the smartphone; but still, these possibilities are enabled by the gadget's script and may cause a change in users' behaviour after its acquisition.

In that sense, I have collected relevant information about how they previously performed everyday activities and how they perform them now. Furthermore, I have asked them to explain why the way they perform activities has changed and whether the changes relate to newly acquired appliances or to external/other factors. As my interest is based on consumption, I will continue by presenting the reported changes that occurred due to the influence of new appliances as well as those changes that resulted in the introduction of new appliances.

Jenifer described how her practices of cooking and cleaning the kitchen were completely transformed over recent years. After buying an electric cooking pot, Jenifer realized that it was no longer necessary to dedicate her attention to the preparation of food while cooking. As an electric pot can only cook one dish at a time, Jenifer decided to invest in an electric rice cooker and on an electric stove. According to Jenifer, she can cook almost everything in the electric pots without being present in the kitchen. An activity that used to require the few remaining hours at the end of Jenifer's days was then suppressed to a few minutes of preparation.

Jenifer's necessities regarding the preparation of food are related to the Brazilian traditional meal characteristics, which are described in subsection 4.3.1. Cooking several dishes in a few hours daily without the help of others is a challenge to the women who work outside the household in Brazil, but Jenifer found a solution for her quotidian struggles through the acquisition and use of electric cooking appliances.

Saving time was also a reason why Jenifer bought an electric cooktop, as she considers it easier and faster to clean and maintain when compared to a traditional gas stove.

Electric cooktops are quite unpopular in Brazil, as electricity is more expensive than natural gas. Nevertheless, Jenifer considered it worth it to pay a bit more for the energy bill and save time and effort to clean the kitchen after a long day at work.

The scripts of electric cooking appliances appealed to Jenifer's lifestyle, convincing her to change her everyday routines. As a side effect, it has changed the resource consumption patterns of her family – they no longer buy natural gas, but they now pay more expensive energy bills. The consumption of household appliances is responsible for increasing resource consumption such as energy and water (Wilhite 2008, 4).

Jenifer's preference for the electric stove is currently an exception within Brazilian households, but its popularization could come to characterize an issue concerning the national demand for electricity.

In line with the issue of cleanliness, the electric cooking appliances support Jenifer's housekeeping in two different ways: during food preparation and by facilitating the kitchen cleaning process. Subsequently, the availability of free time at the end of her working days led Jenifer and her husband to a new acquisition, a laptop. Today, Jenifer uses the extra hours saved by cooking with electric appliances to watch telenovelas and navigate on the Internet with her recently acquired PC.

Everyday Danilo spends at least two hours of his free time in the evening playing videogames at home. To improve his gaming experience, he bought a more modern and wider TV set. He considers playing videogames the highlight of his day and his best option of leisure on weekdays, together with the smartphone. Danilo and his partner have a smartphone each and he stated that the acquisition of these products increased the quality of their leisure times, which used to be mundane.

When asked about other leisure options, Danilo said there are not many activities available during the week in Cabo Frio. Besides, as he and his partner both work until late, Danilo considers it is not very safe to do things outside the house at late hours. Consequently, they have chosen to buy appliances that enhance their experience inside the house and help them to relax after a busy day at work.

What is more, Danilo and his partner like to travel; at least once a month they travel to Teresópolis, a town in the mountains, to visit his extended family. To ease their trips, the couple bought a new and more powerful motorcycle, since the one Danilo had before did not serve for traveling purposes. The influence of infrastructural matters over the purchases of Danilo's family is noticeable, as the lack of leisure options and security force them into the house, creating the need to enhance their experiences at home. Likewise, the poor quality of the inter-municipal transportation system caused the couple to acquire their own vehicle.

Similar to Danilo, Sheila said her grandson Carlos prefers to use his free time to stay at home playing online games on his PC than to go out. Carlos works in the evenings in a cafeteria in the same neighbourhood where they live. Apart from the days when his two-year-old daughter comes to visit, Carlos can always be found in his room by the PC, or using his smartphone to play and chat with friends, always online.

Because of his low wage working at the cafeteria, Sheila does not ask Carlos to contribute to the household expenses. However, he pays for the Internet bill, as Sheila does not make any use of it. The fact that Carlos has a computer and a smartphone required him to acquire an Internet data service. Additionally, the online gaming allows Carlos to stay safe at home and still keep socially interacting with his friends, further avoiding extra expenditures on other leisure activities.

Carlos and Sheila have recently moved to a new neighbourhood, which she describes as safe and very calm. Sheila stated she misses spending time chatting with her old neighbours and the support they give to each other. She talked about the old days with nostalgia in her smile, saying they used to have good times when she was younger, drinking beer and even dancing outside in the streets after coming back from work on warm summer evenings.

The picture described by Sheila used to be commonly seen in the country, mostly in poor and low middle class areas, especially during the warm seasons. People used to spend time outside in the streets where they lived, chatting with neighbours in the evenings after dinner while the children were playing outside. Nonetheless, today this habit is becoming increasingly rare. Several poor neighbourhoods have become unsafe, pushing people away from the streets. Still, the popularity of the TV set may also have

contributed to emptying the streets, as now almost every household contains the appliance, and the catchy telenovelas are on the air for the entire evening interspersed with news, from 18:00 until late hours.

Currently in her new neighbourhood, Sheila spends her leisure time mainly watching TV, as neither the neighbours nor her grandson are keen to chat. Whilst Sheila is a cook and is passionate about food, she has recently lost the motivation to prepare her food. According to her, they have been eating a lot of processed food, meaning she spends less time in the kitchen preparing dinner and is able to follow the three telenovelas at Globo.

Thus, alterations in the environmental and social spheres are introducing new practices to Sheila's family routines. The TV channel schedule has an indirect influence on their everyday life; they now consume more processed ready-to-eat food as a consequence of Sheila's habit of watching TV, which she has substituted for the social interactions she used to have with her former neighbours.

Julia is a retired seamstress and apart from small sewing alterations and repairs she does now and then, her routine is modest. She watches TV and does the housework, cooking and cleaning the house where she lives alone. Given her advanced age and poor health conditions, she avoids leaving her house, which is located below her daughter's. Because of the physical proximity, Julia has good contact with her daughter's family, and helps with looking after her grandson when needed.

Regardless of what Julia does, her TV set is always on, tuned to the New Pentecostal church channel with a priest proffering religious words. Even during our interview Julia refused to turn off the TV set, she turned the volume down to allow me to record our talking. I asked if this was a constant habit in her life and Julia's answer was affirmative. She told me that her family has had a TV set for a long time, as her husband used to repair them when he was alive.

Nonetheless, her busy routine of taking care of nine children and working as a seamstress on the side did not allow her to watch much television when she was younger. Once her children had grown up, her husband had died and she had retired,

Julia's daily life has drastically changed. The TV and her religion took the empty space left by the busy day-to-day, helping Julia to fulfil her necessities of human interaction.

Fernanda is thankful for the practicalities her new appliances brought to her life. After many years washing clothes by hand due to her mother's scepticism regarding washing machines, Fernanda recognizes how much easier her life is now that she finally does not have to dedicate two days of her week – and a lot physical effort – to doing the family's laundry – although she admits she still washes delicate clothes by hand. Despite her recognition of the washing machine efficiency, Fernanda does not have an electric beater: "I prefer to whisk my cake batter by hand. It turns out much better." She states that she is used to doing it and does not see any advantage in the electric appliance.

I found her statement interesting, I do not know if Fernanda made up an excuse to justify the fact that her family does not own an electric beater (see subsection 5.3) or if it is a case of embodied knowledge, where Fernanda is used to whisking batter by hand and finds it useless or less efficient to buy and own a machine that cannot perform a better job than hers – probably the same feeling her mother has regarding the washing machine. Accordingly, even though Fernanda used rational arguments to base her choices about the washing machine, other subjective matters have discouraged her from acquiring an electric beater.

Hence, the examples discussed above help to clarify how the introduction of new appliances interferes with the performance of routine practices, either by altering them, or by introducing new practices and thus changing people's perceptions of their day to day lives. In a cyclical system, changing perceptions may create different necessities, leading to the consumption of other appliances, as will be explained and exemplified in the next section.

5.2 Relations with acquired goods

To understand the consumers' relations and perceptions regarding their goods, I asked my informants to select one "everyday life-changing" appliance among the things they possess. Hereafter, I present each of my informants' selected appliances. I asked them to support their answers with arguments, explaining why the selected appliance was chosen among others they have or had before.

Julia chose the washing machine and used her past as her main argument to defend her choice – she told me the story of her life, from her poor childhood in Cabo Frio to present day. Julia started working at the age of eight as a housemaid for a family, and laundry was one of her tasks. After getting married, Julia stopped working as a maid, but she still had to perform the housework and do her family's laundry. Note that, until the 70's, Cabo Frio was a simple small village and the electricity grid was not available in poor neighbourhoods, nor was running water.

I used to spend a lot of time washing clothes! I used to take the clothes to wash by the well, with a washbasin. We had no running water here in Cabo Frio when I got married; I had to fetch water from the well with a beer barrel, there in the neighbourhood where we lived (...). The well was near the bridge. We used to go there to fetch water for everything. It was a terrible dry spell, [we have been through] much sacrifice...

Later, Julia's family moved to Rio where they lived in a house with running water and electricity, though she did not have access to a washing machine yet as it was an expensive appliance. In Brazil, washing machines started to be produced in the 50's (Whirlpool 2015), but its popularization is still in its course (see Figure 5 **Error! Reference source not found.**). She raised nine children while working as a seamstress on the side and doing all the housework.

Julia washed her family's clothes by hand for decades, until she acquired a semi-automatic washer – which was not the one elected as her favourite – once her children had already moved out. Ten years ago, Julia bought her first washing machine and experienced a new way of doing the laundry. "The washing machine has drastically changed my routine. Too bad my kids were grown already." The freed up time and effort was her main argument to embracing the washing machine as a life-changing appliance.

Similar to Julia, Sheila grew up in Cabo Frio and went through similar hitches to perform everyday tasks given the city's poor infrastructure in the past. Hence, she has similarly picked the washing machine as her everyday life-changing appliance. Sheila alleged that its timesaving capacity is the most appealing feature of the washing machine. Before acquiring it, she had to plan her entire week in advance to fit laundry schedules to her day-to-day activities, a minimum of six hours to wash only her clothes. Now, she uses the remaining time to watch TV.

Jurema, Sara and Marinalva gave me similar statements about their favourite appliance: the fridge-freezer – it is relevant to mention that none of them has washing machines (Jurema and Sara have semi-automatic washing machines, Marinalva washes clothes by hand), and that fact may have been significant for the definition of their choices. Even though Jurema has a simple fridge, she believes a fridge-freezer would have the power to change her routine, as it would allow her to buy more products at super-markets' sales, enhancing her family budget by stocking cheap food. Besides, she would be able to freeze leftovers and save time preparing everyday meals for the family.

Sara declared that replacing a simple fridge five years ago for a fridge-freezer changed her everyday life. Expressing satisfaction, she told me how happy she was for being able to buy a modern and spacious fridge-freezer. Sara got used to her boss' fridge-freezer and the habit she assimilated from it; the bigger freezer compartment allows Sara to prepare large amounts of beans and freeze them, defrosting small portions every day to serve with the meals, which spares her time and make her cooking routine simpler.

Sara's experience with the fridge-freezer is an example of a habit built by embodied knowledge. She acquired it at her boss' kitchen and, whenever cooking for her family, she missed the appliance that could enable her to replicate the habit at home. The influence of this habit was so strong in Sara's routine that it became, in her words, "a dream" to be able to reproduce the practice at home when she finally bought herself a fridge-freezer.

The arguments presented by the supporters of the fridge-freezer indicate how the cultural aspects present on Brazilian cooking habits influence the necessities and perception of appliances' utilities. The tradition of eating cooked beans and rice as side dishes in every meal creates a specific necessity for Brazilian women. Thus, appliances that can enhance the preparation of food will naturally be useful to them, as they must cook four to five different dishes every day for lunch and dinner.

Jenifer's choice is based on the same argument. Although she possesses every electric appliance on my list and more, Jenifer elected the electric rice-cooker as her favourite and everyday life-changing appliance. She described it as "marvellous" and "essential", and she emphasises its timesaving and practical features: "One does not need to

dedicate attention to cook with it. I think it is absurd that people need to cook in a hurry and still have to pay attention to the cooking. “This pot has improved the quality of many people’s lives, especially mine!”

Marinalva has only a fridge and a TV set, and she could not pick one as the most “everyday life-changing”. Her statement about the importance of the fridge was not much different from Sara’s, though Marinalva did not assimilate the habit by performing practices, but by witnessing her sister’s everyday practices. Her sister, who is also her neighbour, used to give room in her fridge to Marinalva, but after some incidents involving her nephews and her children’s yogurts, she decided to stop using it.

Seeing the practicalities brought by the fridge to her sister’s routine made Marinalva want one too, and three years ago, she acquired her first fridge by donation. The biggest alteration caused by the fridge to her everyday life concerns grocery shopping habits and food preparation. As Marinalva voiced, she could neither buy fresh produce nor cook large amounts of food. Meat, dairy and salad leaves, for example, had to be bought and consumed immediately because of the warm weather of Cabo Frio. Cooked beans had to be boiled three times a day in order to be preserved, and visits to the supermarket were a daily routine.

Now, after acquiring a fridge, she can better plan grocery purchases, going to the supermarket once a week and making sure the family will be able to eat meat through the entire month. Marinalva said that before the fridge, it used to be difficult for her to save money until the end of the month to buy meat and fresh produce, as the social benefit is deposited in her account on the first business day every month. Therefore, her family used to end up having a poor diet during those times. Now, she can store meat and other fresh produce in the freezer compartment.

I asked about the alterations in their eating habits and the eventual introduction of processed food and Marinalva said they, in fact, eat more greens now: “We used to eat more rooted vegetables, potatoes, beets, carrots; they last longer without going bad. Now, I can buy greens too. My kids love lettuce, spinach, kale...” According to Marinalva, she never buys processed food because it is expensive and tastes “weird”.

The TV set Marinalva bought a year ago changed the family's leisure routine. She said that it is easier for her to perform housework while her son is distracted watching cartoons. Moreover, she is now following the telenovelas and watching the news every day. Marinalva, who was an occasional watcher, has turned into a regular TV spectator.

Before, she used to go to her sister's house to watch a few episodes and "spicy stretches" of telenovelas, and she was not as acquainted with the actors and characters as she is now: "Oddly enough, now I know better about what is going on, and I can join the conversations about the actors" she said laughing. Furthermore, Marinalva noticed that the way she perceives the world around her has drastically changed in the course of the last year and that the world became a violent place. Having started following the news, she became more concerned about social problems than she used to be when she only listened about corruption and violent cases from other people.

The young Ludimila has also elected the TV set as her favourite appliance. She even considers it more useful than the washing machine, and believes she cannot live without a TV set. Although she concedes that she terribly misses Internet access when she is deprived of it, Ludimila thinks watching TV is her favourite leisure activity of all.

When I posed the question to Danilo, he automatically picked the washing machine. "It helps her [his partner] a lot. She works now and does not have time to put so much effort into washing our clothes. And what helps her helps me too." Subsequently, I was keen to hear his opinion on something that had changed his routine. Danilo chose his new motorcycle, as he now can use it to travel and as it makes him feel freer. Due to the more powerful motorcycle, he and his partner now visit their extended family regularly, which has helped to strengthen their bond.

The mobile phone was Maria's choice. She argued it changed her routine by making it more practical. It has increased her sales, as now she can remotely contact her clients, prepare the merchandise prior and bring only what interests each client. In Maria's opinion, the mobile phone saves her time and helps her both save and make more money, enhancing her income.

João selected the car as the possession that has better enhanced his family lifestyle, but he elected the smartphone as the appliance that had significantly altered their everyday.

The only moment when the family gets together on weekdays is at lunchtime. Where it was once a time used to talk about their lives, happenings and amenities, now his son does not join the conversations anymore, since he is overly busy using the smartphone: “Every spoonful he eats is followed by a touch in the screen. It is really annoying!” João was the only informant who singled out an appliance that had altered his everyday life in a negative way.

Elana did not elect a specific appliance, but the access to the Internet – she uses several appliances to access the web, such as smartphones, a tablet and a PC. Along with her, the routine of her family has considerably changed after they started using the service: “Today, all kids want is to use PCs and phones. Life has changed, for better or for worse, because some people know how to use the Internet for the good, but many people use it to do stupid things.” Her children prefer to play online games than to play outside and be with friends, as they used to do before they had access to the Internet.

Elana had to impose a limit of daily hours for her children to use the Internet; after the limited amount of time, they have to do other activities, preferably outside or interacting with the family. Moreover, the punishment methodology used by Elana to educate her children has also changed. Before, they used to be forbidden to go outside, but the chastisement became a prize when they started to play online. Now, misbehaviour or bad deeds are punished by having access to the Internet turned off for the rest of the day.

Eduarda agreed with her sister about the Internet being life changing. Her personal experiences with the web were positive, as she uses it to stay in contact with her distant beloved ones. She too recognizes its educative features, and believes she and her daughter can learn faster and more from researching online. However, Eduarda believes the satellites responsible for distributing the Internet connection worldwide are damaging the environment and people’s health. She thinks that diseases like cancer are becoming recurrent because of mobile phone and Internet signals.

Finally, Fernanda’s elected appliance was the PC. Although she has only ten percent of her sight remaining and she cannot see the screen or actively use the PC, she thinks it has changed her everyday life because it allows her quick access to ample information

through a third-party intermediate. Whilst she does not use the PC herself, similarly to Eduarda, Fernanda believes that it helps to improve her knowledge.

Previously, when Fernanda needed information, she would have to look it up in books. However, she can no longer read, and she believes her helpers would not be willing to read books for her frequently. Today, her husband and her sister help her by doing searches online, about her disease as well as other subjects. Fernanda would like to be able to use social media to interact online with friends, but she gave up on this dream once her sight got worse.

After describing my informants' statements about their elected life-changing appliances, it is then possible to understand how the inconspicuous and ordinary action of acquiring things hides complex features, such as the capability to instigate a chain reaction, changing the way people perform and thus, changing the way they perceive their lives and the word surrounding them.

What is more, the influence of social factors such as gender division of labour, environmental conditions such as the warm weather and cultural aspects such as food traditions have also proved to be determinant in building people's desires, perceptions and consumption behaviours.

5.3 Possession as a mean to success

As an antithesis to the intrinsic value of humbleness (subsection 4.3.1), the emergent economy and the changes in consumption patterns also brought with it the necessity to portray personal success.

As stated by DaMatta (1984, 31-32) *trabalho*, the word for work in Portuguese, etymologically relates to punishment. *Trabalho* originates from the Latin word *tripaliare*, which means to punish with a *tripaliu*, an instrument used to torture the slaves in Ancient Rome in contrast, the English word *work* means to act, to do. Moreover, the author states that the concept of working is understood by Brazilians as something biblical, grounded on the Catholic tradition that, different from the Calvinist concept that outlines work as a mean to salvation, defines work as castigation,

something horrible. This concept was forged to support and justify the slavery system, but its heritage is still pulsing in the Brazilian society of today.

Nevertheless, the conformism and the engrained ideas have finally begun to change, as the humble, the poor and the mixed Brazilian masses start to understand and accept that it is possible and honourable to thrive through hard work, as was repeatedly stated by former president Lula – being himself an icon of this movement, an example that a member of the masses can thrive and reach the highest position in Brazilian society.

In that sense, showing one's possessions is a way to expose to others how hard one is working. It is likewise a way to bypass the humbleness tacit norm that impedes one to brag and verbalize one's assets. I identify here a social phenomenon that is slightly similar to the "American dream" plot. The American dream is an ideal created and reinforced in the US during the first half of the 20th century, in a time of great instabilities brought by war and the financial crisis. The American dream undergirds hard work and meritocracy through the idea "of individual success through equal access to ample opportunities with the most formidable challenge" using the slogan "You can have it all" to massively advertise it (Marchand 1985, 285-287, 363).

"The Brazilian ideal" – that is how I have decided to call the movement I am about to expose – does not reinforce the "equal access to opportunities" as there is no such thing in Brazil, but instead it emphasizes gratitude and meritocracy through hard work. Massive media depict the recently blossomed Brazilian ideal: in telenovelas, "good" characters are commonly illustrated as hard workers from poor backgrounds.

He (typically a man) usually gifts his parents or grandparents expensive goods such as a TV set or a PC on special dates such as birthdays and mothers' day, as a symbol of his thriving. This type of scene is a portrait of a distinguished happening and involves the whole family, which gathers around the gift and celebrates the "good guy", a man who values his elders. To bestow an expensive good upon an elder is a way to circumvent the Christian values by showing respect and care, but still displaying success.

I am not sure whether the media players or retail chains were the ones that started this trend, but it has proven to be efficient for both. The retail chains prepare big campaigns of expensive goods on Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day and Valentine's Day, linking the

high prices with the care the consumer has for his/her beloved ones, just like the telenovelas show what they are supposed to do.

Regarding the fieldwork, I noticed the Brazilian ideal was present in some of my informants' statements, but in a very subjective way. Usually when I asked people about the appliances they possess, the younger – up to 45 years old, who are climbing the social ladder – would enumerate their things in what seemed to be a pleasant moment. They had smiles on their faces and some even told me that they did not use all of these things, but bought some of them just for self-satisfaction.

If my informants, by chance, did not mention an item I had in my list – the list is an extensive one, contained in Appendix A – I would ask about it, in case they have forgotten to mention something. Where they did not have an appliance, their facial expressions would automatically change and the lack of the appliance would be justified with a statement such as “I do not like food mixers”, “I use my mother’s PC, so I do not need to buy one for me” or “It is nice, I may buy one, but now I have other priorities”.

Relating to that, Jenifer proudly told me about how she consumes to please herself. She talked about how she loves to buy things, especially machines and appliances. Jenifer feels empowered to go inside a store and buy whatever she feels like. I do not remember other people being as sincere about the feeling of self-satisfaction as Jenifer was. Other informants mentioned it, but mainly as something small and negative, in a self-deprecating manner, but not Jenifer. She perceives shopping as a symbol of freedom and happiness, which in her point of view, is the most important aspects of being an independent woman.

Similar to Jenifer, but a little less self-assured, Danilo was proud about his recent purchases: a new motorcycle, a modern TV set and a video game. He said he is proud to gift himself and his partner with the best, and to be able to improve their life standards through consumption. In addition, he associates purchasing power with pride, mentioning his father as his major supporter and enthusiast of his professional success.

Sheila had a sense of pride in her voice when telling me about the first washing machine she bought herself – the two washing machines she had before were acquired by donation. Her pride was sublime and silent as if she was trying to hide it from me, but I

could notice it from her facial expression and tone of voice. That is what the Brazilian ideal is about: it is a mix of staying humble on the one hand, but deserving to be pleased by the acquisition of new goods and to display to others the fruits of personal efforts and merits on the other, but still within humble boundaries. Namely, the working masses are turned into frequent consumers; however, they remain under social control as I explain below.

5.4 The introduction of a new order

The materialization of effort and success through durable goods is a trend that can be observed as well in popular songs and social manifests. A rhythm that recently became popular among the youth, the *funk ostentação* – which translates to something like the beat of ostentation – is a variation of popular Brazilian funk music.

Brazilian funk music was created after the American funk beats from the 80's, but developed its own identity. The lyrics relate to a variety of subjects and usually tell about the everyday life of the poor, containing social critiques – some have inappropriate content related to violence and sex and are censored from traditional media – always accompanied by a dance beat. The social role of funk in poor Brazilian communities is similar to American rap among the poor in the USA.

Similarly as in American Hip Hop, *funk ostentação* songs state the importance of having expensive clothes, accessories, machines and cars as a way to materialize one's hard work, but still maintaining the humbleness of a person who grew up in a poor community. In the song videos, the MCs (the ones singing the songs) are shown to be surrounded by beautiful women, wearing labelled clothes and driving expensive cars. The image brought by these videos and also some lyrics are usually sexist, and the women are exposed or portrayed to be worth about as much as the expensive things, that must be conquered with money. More than a rhythm, *funk ostentação* became an identity of a social group (Pereira cited in Brum 2013).

The appreciators of *funk ostentação* are young, poor and mixed from the outskirts and they have recently begun to claim their position in the Brazilian society. A social manifesto called *Rolezinho* started in São Paulo and became popular all over the country, particularly in big cities and State capitals. It consists of gatherings of youth in

a mall, with the aim to listen to music, flirt and have a good time. It sounds like a quotidian scene in a big city, if it were not for the social inequality gap: the numerous poor youth choose upper/middle class malls to gather.

The regular mall goers feel outraged by the mass of "trailer trash", "bandits", "prostitutes" and "Negros" – in the mall goers' words – invading an "orderly space". Customarily, in the occurrence of a *Rolezinho*, internal security guards and even the police are called to stop the "disorder" (Brum 2013). Although the *rolezeiros* (as the participants are called) do not perform any illegal action, many are detained to give further explanations. What makes the *Rolezinho* something inconceivable and even criminal through society's eyes are not formal rules, but ancient tacit norms that differentiate the poor, mixed and black from the rest of the Brazilian society:

The [movement's] organizers, who are young men working as office boys and general assistants, fear to lose their jobs after being arrested by the police for being where they supposedly should not be – it is an unwritten law, but always upheld in Brazil. The malls' security guards were oriented to monitor any 'suspicious' young men looking at windows, even when alone, wishing for Oakley glasses and Mizuno sneakers, two icons of *funkeiros ostentação*. On Christmas Eve, Brazil shows its deformed racist face. It is needed to gaze it, because racism, yes, is a crime (ibid.).³⁸

As stressed by Brum (ibid.), the *rolezeiros* dare to step into a territory that was initially built to ban them (the upper class malls). In a transgressor movement, they reclaim to break the ghetto limits by making use of exclusive social spaces such as malls. Besides, the *rolezeiros* do not crave the TV sets and white goods (traditional symbols of the "new middle class" consumption), target to their social strata. Instead, they desire international and luxurious brands that were originally projected for the generally white elite.

Though the *Rolezinhos* are not present in Cabo Frio, I found it relevant to mention the movement here because of its symbolic role as a symbol of today's picture of racial prejudice and social prejudice in Brazil. Furthermore, I dare say that the *Rolezinhos* may be an introduction to the next unfolding of the new consumers' consumption phenomenon, with the poor youth craving for expensive superfluous goods such as a requisition of their place in the sun in the Brazilian social picture. The introduction of

³⁸ Statement translated from Portuguese.

durable goods and the insertion of new practices to their routines have affected the way the new consumers perceive the world – especially the young – thus, a new social order may be needed to fit their novel aspirations.

6 Perceiving consumption of public goods

Until this point, consumption has been approached from the perspective of private consumption goods. In this chapter, I introduce the outcomes of my research concerning consumption of public goods. Looking back to the concept exposed in Chapter 3, in Brazil, the supplying of public goods is a responsibility of the government.

As citizens, and consequently, consumers of public goods, I asked my informants about their perceptions of the public services offered in Cabo Frio, which they depend on and constantly enjoy. The quality of the available public services is a relevant matter to the way people perceive the world – and according to Samuelson (1954, 388-389), to wellbeing – as it is not possible to access one's perception without taking into consideration all the variables that affect it.

The aim of my inquiry is to understand if and how my informants' perceptions of public goods affect their perception of their everyday life. Therefore, how are their perceptions affecting their wellbeing and thus shaping their desires.

6.1 Evaluation of public services

When asked about public services, complaints related to its low quality were common among my informants' answers. They are mostly dependent on the public system to have access to education, health, transportation, and security services. Unanimously, they agreed that the services offered should be considerably improved to fit minimum acceptable quality standards, although some of them recognize investments and improvements have occurred lately. Hereafter I describe each public service I questioned my informants about, according to their statements.

6.1.1 Health

The health system was generally well evaluated. Although my informants did not appear to have complete trust in the public health system if they had an emergency, they

noticed improvements in the facilities' infrastructure and on the size and competence of the staff over the last few years.

Elana had been through long-term treatment to treat a breast cancer. Additionally, she usually accompanies her mother on her routine visits to the doctor. From those experiences, she had the impression that the staff at both the local hospital and the local medical centre seem to be overworked. Elana was under the impression that the stress and fatigue had the capacity to affect the diagnosis and prognosis, to the detriment of the patients reliant on the services.

According to Julia, who is dependent on medicines to control blood pressure and diabetes, she would never be able to afford the medication she needs without the financial help of her family. Julia recently went through surgery, and she expressed her satisfaction with the treatment she received from the public system. However, she criticized the availability of specialists and tests: "Sometimes there are no specialists when they are needed, and it may take about 20 days to book a simple test; it took me two months this one time. Depending on one's conditions, a patient cannot wait that long."

Maria also went through a similar situation as Julia regarding tests. Maria was to undergo surgery a week after the interview: "The surgery will be covered by the public health system, but I had to pay for the required tests. If I could not pay for the tests I would have missed the deadline to get the surgery's expenses covered." On the word of Maria, this is an interesting situation, as the doctors defining the surgery deadlines should be able to synchronize the dates with the availability of tests. In addition, the capacity to perform tests should be improved to meet the demand, which is not happening.

Because some of them are extremely religious, a mix of faith and reality was seemingly unavoidable, as in Jurema's case. She ascribes her trust in the public health system to God and to faith: "I hear people talking bad about public health services, but every time I needed it, God has sent good doctors my way. I cannot blaspheme about that. I know there are several irregularities, but God always conducted me and my family to be well assisted."

It may show a lack of direct trust she has in the system, although she did not mention any critique about the services – maybe to avoid blasphemy. Consequently, I am still uncertain about her final perceptions regarding the health system.



Figure 11: People waiting to get medical care in a public Emergency Room Unit (UPA) (left); health centre equipped to offer free vaccination. Pictures: Marcela Oliveira Svoren.

6.1.2 Education

My informants' opinions were divided regarding the quality of the education system. Some connect the education system with security issues and attribute the rise of criminality to the poor quality of public education. Maria is among them, she believes the school of today lacks the ability to teach values and that the young do not respect it as an institution, as it used to be at the time when she was a student. Julia thinks that the disconnection of the education system from religion has decreased its capacity to impose respect on the students, though she stated that respect and limits should be learned at home, as it is a responsibility ascribed to family.

On the other hand, Ludimila, Danilo and Jurema – the former referring to the experiences of her young sons – have positively evaluated the schools they attended and the education they received from the public system. They said the current system relies on the student to take their education seriously: “The ones who want to learn will learn. But the ones who do not will walk away with their certificates, anyway” said Ludimila. In their opinion, it is possible to learn through the present system, as teachers are available and the necessary structures are in place. Ludimila, Danilo and Jurema's sons

all undertook public education until the end of the *Ensino Médio* – corresponding to the high school level.

Nevertheless, professionalization and higher education are still hard to reach for young Brazilians. As many have to work to support their families from early ages, it becomes hard to combine work with further studies. Besides, the majority of courses and programmes available are private, the public institutions and universities offer a very limited amount of spaces and the competition is massive and unfair, as explained by Jon Marcus in his article about Brazilian public universities for *The Atlantic*:

Federal universities, (...) are at the top of this country's higher-education hierarchy. They are also extraordinarily competitive in a country where there is significant and growing demand for higher education – and where the people who score at the top of the SAT-style university entrance exam [the Vestibular] are predominantly rich, white students whose parents were able to afford to send them to private high schools. So the people who can most afford to pay for their higher educations end up not only getting into the best schools, but also spending nothing on tuition. "It's not really fair," Ana Carolina said about the privilege she enjoys (Marcus 2015).

Despite the recent efforts from the federal government to create quota systems based on income, race and public education history to democratize access to public universities (MEC 2012), there are still many barriers inhibiting the poor from joining higher education. Public universities are mainly present in the State capitals; to move and to afford living in a big city is not a possibility for many of the young living in small towns, to mention an example. Therefore, several students coming from public schools give up on higher education before even trying taking the numerous tests that compose the Vestibular³⁹.

In order to ease access to private universities, the Ministry of Education (MEC) has created social programmes such as Fies⁴⁰ and ProUni⁴¹, which have been structured

³⁹ Vestibular is a system employed by the Brazilian universities and colleges to grant students access to higher education. The classification is based on grades achieved in a series of tests taken after the completion of the secondary degree, the *Ensino Médio*. The tests vary according to courses, field of knowledge and institutions. The spaces are given to the best general grades, and each institution decides to host its own tests or to join unified tests, such as the Enem (National Examination for the Secondary Degree) (Mundo Vestibular 2015). *Statement translated from Portuguese.

⁴⁰ Fies: The Financial Aid Fund for Students is a programme of the Ministry of Education (MEC) designated to finance higher education courses' tuition fees. It targets the students enrolled in private institutions which have been well evaluated by the MEC evaluation processes (MEC 2015a) *Statement translated from Portuguese.

over time; still these programmes do not cover all the issues Brazil need to tackle to achieve true democratization of high education. In keeping with a report by INEP et al. (2011, 2) in 2010, 6,379,299 students have enrolled in higher education institutions in Brazil, but only 973,839 have successfully completed their courses. Using the 2010 conclusions' rate and 4,725,825 as the average number of enrolments between 2005 and 2006⁴² (ibid.) to calculate the dropout rate for the term, the result is a worrying 79.4%.

Following the course is a common problem as many struggle to dedicate the necessary time to their studies while working on the side to pay for their living and for study's expenses. Even though some students may count on scholarships and financial aid, these programmes comprise only the college tuition, disregarding the further costs of education (transportation, materials etc.) and general life costs.

Ludimila paid for a professionalization course, as it was only available in the private system. Danilo's partner went the same way as Ludimila, and Danilo aspires to specialize as a safety and health technician, but he has no financial means to pay for the course yet. Both Ludimila and Danilo said they aim to undertake higher education someday, but that it is not a possibility now, because of the necessity to work and to take care of their families.

Different to Ludimila and Danilo, Marinalva's 19-year-old daughter is studying to be a physiotherapist at a private university. She undertook public education in school and successfully secured a place in a private course, on the words of her mother. However, Marinalva's brother pays for the course, as neither Marinalva nor her daughter have financial means to afford it. Furthermore, her daughter works as an assistant in a public kindergarten and her salary helps to pay for the course's extra expenses such as books, meals and transportation. Consistent with Marinalva's statement, the fact that her daughter is enrolled in a higher education institution is a result of an effort made by several family members, not only hers. Everyone who is supporting her daughter is hoping that the girl's degree brings economic stability to the whole family.

⁴¹ ProUni: The Programme "University for All" aims to grant partial and full scholarships at private higher education institutions and professionalization centres to students originated from families with per capita income of up to three minimum salaries. The candidates are selected according to their grades, obtained on the Enem (National Examination for the Secondary Degree) tests. From 2005 to 2014, the programme has already assisted 1,4 million students (MEC 2015b). *Statement translated from Portuguese.

⁴² Typically, higher education courses in Brazil should regularly be fulfilled in 8 to 10 semesters.

Marinalva's family story is quite similar to Grace's, described in Daniel Miller's book *Consumption and its consequences*. Grace explains how some members of her extended family in the Philippines financially supported her education and got involved in finding her a job overseas, as an investment. Grace's family invested in her future as a means to capitalize on the future, and accordingly, to be able to cope with the escalating consumption patterns in the Philippines (Miller 2012, 10-11).

6.1.3 Transportation

Generally, my informants see the transportation system as inefficient, concerning the city coverage and the availability of local and inter-city busses. "I find the busses super crowded and slow and they do not come every time they were supposed to (referring to the timetable). Sometimes, it is more worthwhile to walk than to take a bus", explained Jenifer.

The regular price for busses in the city (0.90 USD) was overall considered expensive; however, a social benefit is available for all inhabitants of Cabo Frio, allowing them to pay 0.17 USD per trip. The tariff was considered fair after the benefit was implemented, but Jurema thinks it is still expensive for people making a minimum wage:

I think it [the regular price] is expensive, because everything here is so close [meaning the city is geographically small]. I only take buses now and then, so the social benefit's tariff is ok, but for people working every day doing return trips, I think [to pay for it] it is a struggle. I cannot say only for myself, right. I cannot say it is fair, for people making a minimum wage and having this routine, with children to raise. I think it is expensive, forgive me, but it is!

Elana uses informal transportation when she needs to go to the city centre. She justified her act by saying she does not have time in her day-to-day to wait for the bus to come, and that the trip takes too long. Her sister Eduarda complained about the expensive costs and inefficiency of regional intercity transportation, despite the proximity of the neighbouring towns. Arraial do Cabo, where she works on the weekends, is located about 13 kilometres from Cabo Frio, and the one-way ticket from Eduarda's house there costs 1.20 USD.

Security is also an issue concerning public transportation, episodes like robberies and thefts commonly occur on busses in the region. In the State capital Rio, even more

severe crimes have already happened inside busses, such as kidnappings and rapes. Maria described an incident she and her son witnessed while travelling on a bus to the neighbour town, São Pedro d'Aldeia. As described by her, three armed men stopped the bus pursuing one passenger, she thought they would rob the bus, but they were just interested in this one person. Like Maria, all passengers felt threatened and vulnerable because the criminals could do whatever they want. She believes that nowadays the general population is helpless, living at the mercy of criminals.

As mentioned in section 4.1 regarding the increase in acquisitions of vehicles in Brazil, cars and motorcycles are seen as safer options to the public transportation systems. Accordingly, situations such as the one that Maria went through stimulate people to desire personal vehicles and break free from the danger of city buses.

6.1.4 Security

I have heard different opinions about all the public services offered to the population in Cabo Frio, though the complaints about the rise of violence and criminal activity were unanimous. Violent episodes and the feeling of non-safety were present in all my interviews and were stated as my informants' main concern at present. Be it a walk from work to home in the evening or using the mobile phone in public areas, the elder and the younger have similar worries and behaviours in regard to security.

I believe that insecurity has a significant role in influencing the way people perceive their everyday life. As stated by Fischer (2014, 5), safety and health are some of the core elements of the good life. On top of this, it may influence practices, since security may be considered an infrastructural attribute – related to the sphere of materiality from SPT. For example, one would rather buy a TV set to enhance one's leisure time in the house instead of doing outdoor activities when one's neighbourhood lacks an effective security structure – as in the case of Danilo and his video game described earlier.

To understand the circumstances and the reason why people are claiming to feel more threatened today than ever before, I have written an introduction to Cabo Frio's recent history regarding security issues. Before I begin the analysis over security issues in Cabo Frio, it is important to note that it is not my intention to draw here a critique over

the UPP⁴³ – Pacifying Police Unit – system. Neither is it my intention to criticise the security policies employed by the State government, as it is not the objective of this study.

Instead, I want to explore the current picture of Cabo Frio, where my informants are situated, consequently, having their lives and desires affected by it. I do this as a means to analyse the several statements I have collected that are similar to the following:

Me: What about security?

Jurema: Then it is complicated, right? I think it has become much worse.

Me: Do you mean here in Cabo Frio, or everywhere else?

Jurema: Everywhere, I think... It is just terrible!

Cabo Frio's recent history regarding security issues

After the Rio de Janeiro State Government put into practice a security plan in 2008 (Governo do Rio de Janeiro 2015), the violence picture changed considerably in the State, particularly in medium towns like Cabo Frio. The installation of UPPs in favelas and poor areas of the State capital that were formerly commanded by drug factions, forced the criminal structures to other regions of the state (Beltrame 2014, 14).

The criminals sought areas with minimum infrastructure and market to re-establish their illicit activities, and towns like Cabo Frio were and still are being impacted by this situation. The activities led by the drug factions unleashed on the local dynamics, changed people's routines, especially in low income neighbourhoods, where the criminals find shelter, coverage and manpower.

As was expressed by Elana and Eduarda, their neighbourhood used to be tranquil and, since they came to live there 21 years ago, they have never experienced any episodes of violence. However, nowadays, it is common to hear about violent incidents occurring close by, due to the action of a drug trafficker's faction in the area. Likewise, Ludimila,

⁴³ "UPP (*Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora*, Pacifying Police Unit) is a security programme based on the principles of the "proximity police" (...). Its strategy is grounded on the collaboration of the population with public security institutions. The programme encompasses the partnership between municipal, state and federal governs and different actors from the civil society. It aims to regain the control of communities that are under the domain of drug factions, as well as to ensure that the state and the population maintain a close relationship" (Governo do Rio de Janeiro 2015).

*Statement translated from Portuguese.

Danilo, João and Sara reported the establishment of drug factions and the occurrence of criminal activities over the recent years in the regions where they live. The town, which used to be peaceful, became a stage for diverse crimes, which are progressively becoming frequent.

Sara mentioned having heard shootouts between the police and criminals the evening before the interview and on other evenings previously. According to her, the situation became considerably worse about three to four years ago and since then, her family does not leave the house once it gets dark or during the weekends, which has considerably limited their leisure options.

Ludimila was victim to a robbery at her house and all her electronics were stolen. The criminals burgled during the day, when the house was empty, and took a laptop, a tablet and a smartphone. It was the first time that Ludimila experienced an episode like this in the house where she has been living since she was born. Ludimila is now planning to buy new electronic devices to substitute for the ones that were stolen; however, it will take her a while to do so. By now, she is using a conventional mobile phone and signed off the Internet plan for the house.

Due to the current situation in the town, Danilo does not allow his partner to walk home from work because of his feeling insecure. Danilo and his father take turns to drive the girl to work and back by car or motorcycle. Similarly, all my informants had a story to tell about violent episodes that had recently occurred to them or to an acquaintance.

I went through the security system's statistics to investigate in depth about my informants' statements and perceptions on this matter. I found a database created by the security secretariat of the Rio de Janeiro State that contains monthly police records from every police station in the State. The data series are from the year 2008 onwards.

Unfortunately, there are no official records available from Cabo Frio's police station before this year. Nonetheless, it is still possible to draw some conclusions over the data exposed here.

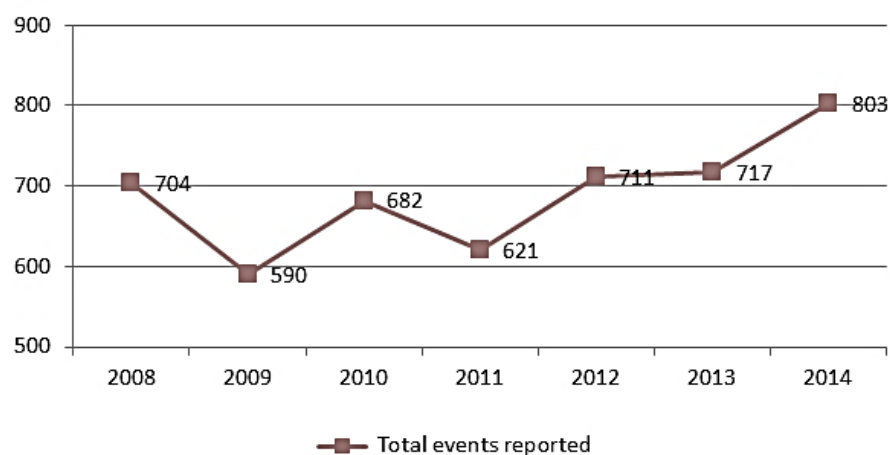


Figure 12: Total police records, registered in every October from 2008 to 2014 in Cabo Frio's Police Station, 126ª DPO. Source: ISP (2014)

Examining the statements of my informants regarding the rise of insecurity and the increase of violent incidents over the last four to three years along with the secondary data exposed in Figure 12 and Figure 13 sheds some light about the crime scenario in Cabo Frio. I have chosen the month of October to analyse records from, as it was the latest month with available data for 2014 at the time I did the secondary data collection.

In Figure 12, it is evident that the total police records increased by 14%, a substantial rise for a six-year period. In Figure 13, one can observe that the total records suffered a variation over the years. Still, it is possible to notice a significant increase of arrests, homicides, thefts, robberies and extortion rates from the year 2011 on. By then, the UPP system was already robust and had reached some of the key *favelas* in Rio where drug factions had their main logistical structures, therefore, disarticulating the mafia's distribution systems. Considering this period alone, the increase in police records' rate was 22,67% from 2011 to 2014. Observe that the given period coincides with the period described in my informants' statements.

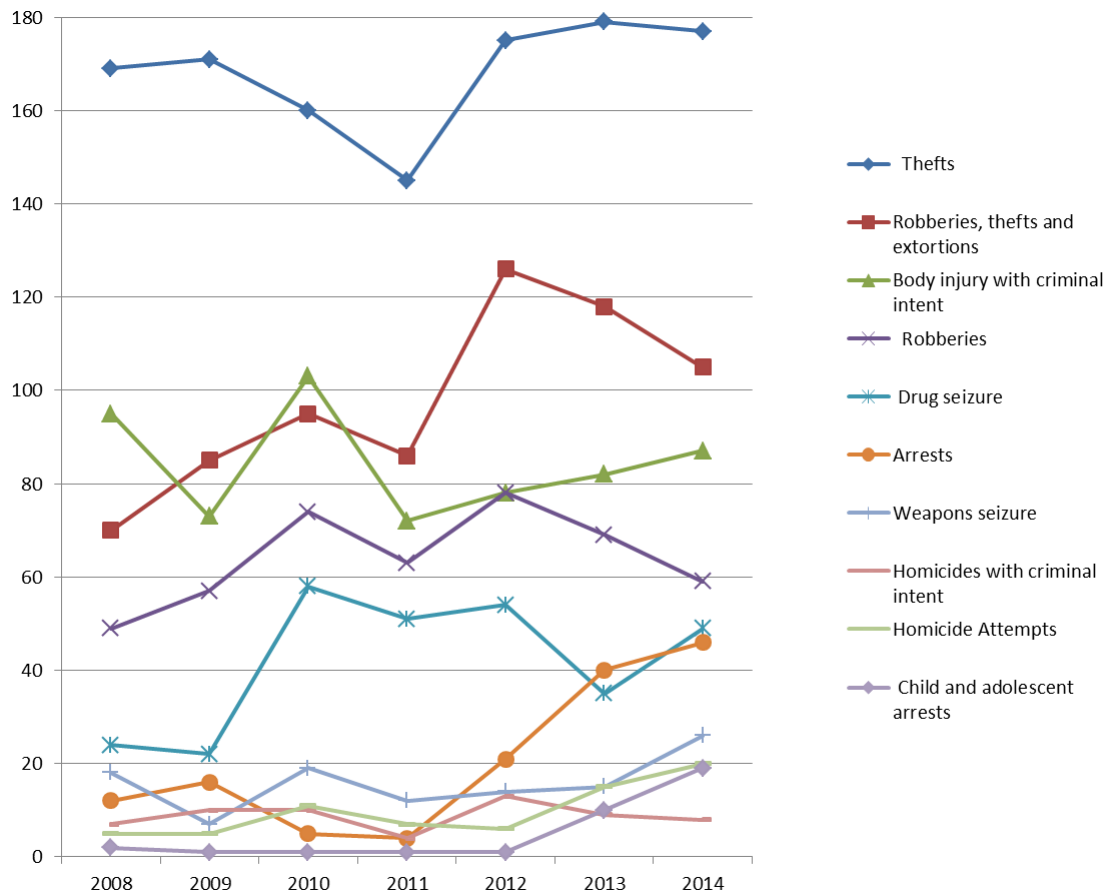


Figure 13: Police records by type of report, registered every October from 2008 to 2014 in Cabo Frio's Police Station, 126^a DPO. Source: ISP (2014)

Furthermore, a huge conflict between the police and drug factions was taking place in some of Cabo Frio's poor neighbourhoods while I was doing fieldwork as I have already mentioned when describing the limitations of the study (subsection 2.6). The police were trying to stop conflicts between two rival drug factions. The intense conflicts took place in peripheral areas of the city and resulted in several deaths and shootouts (Moreira 2014).

The shootings that Sara related about on the week of the interview were probably a result of these conflicts, as it occurred near to her neighbourhood. I lived in Cabo Frio for fifteen years from 1988, and my parents have been living there since then. None of us or any other acquaintance or informant had ever before heard about a situation like the one the town was facing when I was in the field. In fact, a significant reason for having chosen Cabo Frio to do my fieldwork research were its security issues, which I thought could have challenged me in a city like Rio.



Figure 14: *Caveirão* preparing to leave the military police battalion in Cabo Frio towards the communities in conflict. Picture: Marcela Oliveira Svoren.

I was walking to an appointment on one morning when I passed by the local military police battalion⁴⁴. From the sidewalk, I saw a *Caveirão* (Figure 14) being prepared to head out to the conflicts. *Caveirão* – meaning big skull – is a fortified truck purpose-built to suppress armed civil unrest in *favelas*, much like a military tank (Fujita 2014). Its presence is a sign of harsh conflicts (Tardáguila 2008), or as is commonly said, a sign of war.

For the years that I have worked in *favelas* in Rio, I have seen the *Caveirão* sometimes and it was always an alert to suspend work in the field and remove the team from the area, as the police only employ it when severe gunfights are expected. Seeing a *Caveirão* in Cabo Frio for the first time was shocking to me, and similarly to other locals. It was the focus of common conversation in the wake of the conflicts.

According to local newspapers, the conflicts resulted in the death of four drug dealers, killed in confrontation with the police. As a retaliation, drug traffickers had burned two buses and damaged a bank office in a neighbouring locality (Moreira 2014). The circumstances became so drastic that the company responsible for the transportation services in Cabo Frio refused to circulate buses in the conflict area while the police did not take control of the situation, leaving the population of those areas isolated for more than 24 hours (Marques 2014).

⁴⁴ The Brazilian police is militarized (*polícia militar*), thus the police units in Brazil are called battalions.

Going back to my informants' perceptions of public goods, their opinions regarding the available services is overall negative. Although they agree that recent investments were made in some sectors, various flaws were pointed out. Issues regarding the lack of safety and the weakness of the security infrastructure in place are especially disquieting, as safety is one of the main components of the "good life" – also the concept of "safety" comprises access to a trustworthy health system.

Therefore, my informants' perceptions of their everyday lives are likely to be affected by such issues. The understanding of their perspectives on public goods makes it possible to understand their acquisitions and desires regarding things such as vehicles (related to security and transportation) TV sets and videogames (associated with the lack of leisure options and security) to name a few.

Lastly, the information exposed here is relevant for this study in the way that it provides the necessary input to understand correctly my informants' testimonials. The consumption of private goods is undoubtedly affecting people's lives, however, if their perspectives over the consumption of public goods is ignored, the comprehension of the current case study might be compromised. Moreover, the clarification about my informants' opinions about the current standards of public services offered in Brazil introduces the next subsection, where I discuss the recent protests that have occurred in the country.

6.2 The awakening of the Giant

Brazilians called the 2012 wave of demonstrations "the awakening of the Giant", "in a reference to the national anthem, which alludes to the country as a giant (because of its geographic dimensions) that is 'eternally asleep in a splendid cradle'", as explained by Claudia McLeod (2013, 1). After two decades of virtually no social mobilization, Brazilian people gained the streets of mainly every State capital to express their resentment about the system.

As I am about to present, the 2012 protests in Brazil relate to the country's rapid economic development and the consumption phenomena previously described. Therefore, it is imperative to include a brief description of the events in this study. Additionally, the protests are directly related to what I expose in the previous section

regarding the general dissatisfaction of the population with the government and the poor quality of public goods.

As written by John Paul Rathbone (2014) the expectations raised by the Brazilian government over the economic growth and consumption boom are not simply related to the maintenance of consumption level. Especially among the younger, there is a bigger expectation about the improvement of services and the increase of transparency in the public arenas, as stated by the economics professor at the Federal University at Rio de Janeiro Lena Lavinias (cited in *ibid.*) “Wages and mass consumption have grown, but public services – transport, health, education – remain terrible. People do not have access to what they need to participate in the new economy.”

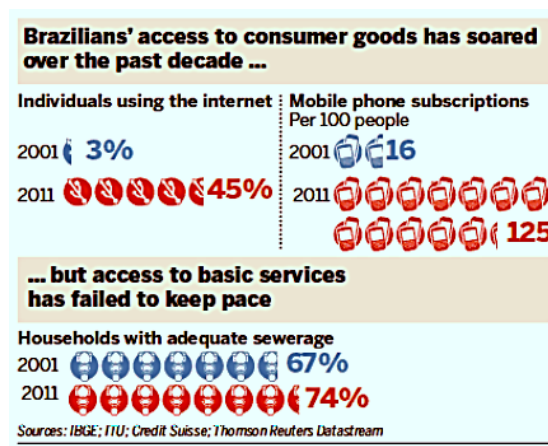


Figure 15: The Financial Times’ graph illustrates how disproportionate the rise in consumption is when compared to public investments in infrastructure. Source: Rathbone (2014)

The inclusion of millions in a consumption-driven lifestyle was not followed by investments in infrastructure and public services. These inequalities exemplified in Figure 15 were some of the accumulated indignations of Brazilians, leading to the protests.

What is more, as stated by Fukuyama (2013), “newly arrived members of the middle class are more likely to be spurred to action (...) higher education levels correlate with people's assigning a higher value to democracy, individual freedom and tolerance for alternative lifestyles”. In other words, to become a “middle class” country, the government must do more than simply facilitate consumption; it must deliver more and better services to an increasingly expectant population.

Accordingly, the protests were related to the extensive amount of taxes paid by the population, especially the poor. In a report published by Ipea (Martins 2009) the disproportional amount of taxes paid by the poor and the rich in Brazil is pointed out, considering direct and indirect taxations. In line with the report, the tax burden of the poor is almost 54% of their income, while the rich pay only 29%. To Nancy Birdsall (2013), the middle class, the poor and the strugglers were disadvantaged by the substantial amount of their incomes spent on indirect taxes. As stated by her, the high amount of indirect taxes is pushing 10% of the Brazilian “strugglers” back into poverty.

Again, the public services that are currently offered as a payback for tax revenue, such as education, health, infrastructure and security, are considered inefficient and ineffective. Minor segments of the population, the ones who are able to afford, choose to prioritize private services such as health insurance, private schools and secure neighbourhoods. However, the ones who cannot afford to pay live at the mercy of the public services that are offered to them (ibid.) – the latter is the case of my informants.

The Brazilian advisor for democratic governance at UNDP Claudia McLeod made an interesting summary of the context and motivations that led to the 2012 protests in her article *Inclusive Participation and Responsive Institutions in an ‘Incomplete Democracy’: The “Awakening of the Giant”* (McLeod 2013, 2-3). Consistent with the author, whilst some specialists compared the Brazilian protests with the Arabic Spring, there are peculiarities in the former that must be taken into consideration in order to understand the motivations that pushed millions of Brazilians to the streets. McLeod points out three main factors that may have resulted in the demonstrations.

The first factor is what she calls the “incomplete democracy”, or the sense that although the governors are elected throughout democratic elections, still, the system is not in line with people’s demands and expectations. To be exact, the government is not representative. A concrete example of this gap in democracy cited by McLeod was the behaviour of the police troops against peaceful demonstrators, who used violent means to suppress the acts, in a nod to the dictatorial times.

Secondly, the disproportionality of the investments made for the 2014 FIFA World Cup, when compared to the amount invested in basic services such as education and health, got people thinking about the government’s priorities. Finally, the corruption scandals

involving the Labour Party's (PT) president stepped over the line of Brazilians' tolerance: "Increasing allegations of corruption and fraud in public procurement at the central and sub-national levels led to widespread disillusionment as it became clear that free and fair elections did not guarantee more integrity and accountability in public affairs" (ibid., 3).

As stated by Whitaker (2014), despite its great deeds in the social sphere, the PT government was not able to change the unorthodox way politics have been conducted in Brazil. Corruption and bribery were consistently at the heart of political negotiations, and the hope put in the party – especially by the youth – turned into disappointment. Consequently, the mass gained the streets without a specific political lead or flag. Many did not understand what exactly they were asking for, but what people wanted was to have their dissatisfactions noticed, in spite of the then stable economic conjuncture.

The protests were violently repressed by the police and the traditional media generally pictured the demonstrators as vandals, disregarding the main aim of the movements. The biggest newspapers and TV channels insisted on portraying isolated facts of pillage and rampage associated with the demonstrations, marginalizing the general organization and concealing the real numbers of supporters in each event. Slowly, the protests lost strength and once a camera operator died after being hit by fireworks, the protests finally faded away.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to refer to the previous section, where I made an exposition of my informants' perceptions about the public goods they enjoy. Listening to my informants' statements of dissatisfaction concerning the quality of public services made me ponder the 2012 protests. In my reflections, I realized that Brazil has been through numerous transformations in a space of time that is a bit longer than a decade: the several social achievements of PT government that completely altered the country's social picture (e.g. the eradication of hunger); the consumption wave including the poor into the consumption logic; the economic boom and the international attention; the big events hosted (and to be hosted) in the country, among other things.

The PT government could not foresee the consequences of its social programmes, which unleashed the wave of protests against its government ten years later, but its investments in fighting poverty and hunger paid back with expected results. The

strategies employed by the government were and are attempts to push the country on its climb toward further development and, of course, its results may be unexpected, given the uniqueness of the given scenario.

Furthermore, it is imperative to remember how young Brazil is as an independent country (officially since 1822). Similarly, its democratic system is even younger, as the dictatorship recently ended in 1984. The country is still finding its ways into the globalized world as an economic power, while simultaneously trying to develop internally.

7 Conclusions

To conclude my work, I would like to reflect on its relevance: *Why is this thesis important to the study of the environment and sustainability?* I believe its importance relies on some crucial points, which I discuss below before I answer my research questions.

The focus of this thesis is on people's perceptions of their everyday lives after they started consuming durable goods. As mentioned in the introduction, the current consumption patterns are a permanent concern to the environmental issues we face today. Moreover, consumption studies usually address middle and upper classes, given the abundant resources and the obvious existence of the consumption phenomena among these segments of the population.

The recent insertion of other groups into consumption logics creates novel markets, and it has generated what I call the "new consumers". As I have previously explained, the "new consumers" are not necessarily thriving economically, but undoubtedly, they are consuming beyond subsistence levels. Durable goods are now present in an increasing number of poor households in developing countries.

The case study introduced in Chapter 5 reveals the phenomenon of private goods' consumption that recently reached the poor in Cabo Frio and the subjective features that surround this phenomenon. Additionally, the case study relates to public and private aspects of consumption when in Chapter 6 I introduce my informants' perspectives regarding the consumption of public goods. Based on their statements and on secondary data, I discuss the recent social events in Brazil – the protests of 2012 and the *Rolezinhos* phenomenon – looking at the evolution of the Brazilian identity and its metamorphosis, which I have named the "Brazilian ideal".

During the case study discussions, I have explored the minutiae of my informants' testimonials and their behaviours. The subjective features of their speeches such as gestures and voice tones were also included in my analysis, in order to understand the subtleties of my informants' perceptions regarding their routines. Accordingly, the case study and the resulting discussions provide enough material to answer the research questions proposed in this thesis.

Hereafter, I present the findings related to the two secondary questions I have employed, in order to support the answer of the main research question. The following questions form the rationale of this thesis, shaping and framing it.

How have the consumption patterns of the Brazilian “new consumers” changed during the last two decades at the household level?

As I have presented, the objects composing the Brazilian and the *Cabofriense* households have experienced a number of transformations over time. Secondary data show how the access to appliances such as TV sets and refrigerators has lately increased among Brazilian households. Equally, the current propagation of electronic gadgets such as PCs and mobile phones is changing the way people receive information and interact with each other. Finally, the washing machine is on its way to conquering the country, as it can already be found in more than half of Brazilian households and being featured on the other half’s wish lists.

It is clear that having access to durable goods is now a reality for the Brazilian poor when taking into consideration the Brazilian population’s economic profile. The social programmes introduced about a decade ago were efficient in eradicating hunger and fighting extreme poverty, but these programmes were also able to introduce poor families into the consumption wheel. Although the aforementioned socioeconomic phenomenon has driven the internal economy, the changes in consumption patterns of the poor have also resulted in the occurrence of other unpredicted phenomena, such as unprecedented levels of default, alterations in the way people perceive the world and their daily routines. This leads us to the next question, which is as follows:

In what ways have the recently introduced practices and habits changed the families’ everyday lives?

My informants’ statements about what changed in their routines were diverse. An important perception affirmed by many relates to the way durable goods helped them save time. For instance, the fridge-freezer is useful for families because it enables them to stock food, reducing the frequency of their visits to the supermarket to supply the household. Likewise, it gives the possibility to freeze and store precooked meals. It was also said that it contributes to managing the family budget, as the capacity to store food

allows families to buy more products on sale and stock up for the end of the month, a time when poor families usually face financial struggles.

Furthermore, some appliances are similarly recognized for their effort-saving features, as in the case of the washing machine and the electric cookers. The difference between doing laundry by hand and using a washing machine is tremendous, and all the effort and time saved by using the appliance are enough to completely change a Brazilian housewife's lifestyle. As women are responsible for doing virtually all the housework in Brazil, the changes introduced by household appliances are affecting the families' dynamics. Women now increasingly have more time to invest in other activities, such as studying and working outside of the house.

Additionally, people have more spare time to employ in leisure activities, such as watching TV. The popularity of TV sets is impressive; it is present in almost every Brazilian household – and has the largest presence in the country's households when compared to other durable goods. The spreading of TV sets illustrates the importance of this appliance to the Brazilian population as an entertainment device, as well as representing a major provider of information. This gives us with some insights into how influential traditional media in Brazil really is.

Moreover, Internet connected gadgets are recognized as a practical and rapid way to access knowledge and find specific information. When compared to books and newspaper, the Internet, accessed via PC, tablets and smartphones, is perceived as helping to democratize access to information. Online socializing – e.g. through online gaming and social network – was mentioned as an alternative to face-to-face gatherings for young people, due to the increased sense of insecurity in the poor areas of Cabo Frio. Despite its mostly positive features, the access to Internet is similarly seen as worrying, especially concerning children's social lives and health. The old habit of playing active games outside with friends is slowly disappearing as the practice of playing online is locking children inside.

Lastly, the smartphone was blamed for worsening the family interactions of one of my informants – the same appliance that another informant pointed to as a wonderful option for the leisure time for him and his partner. In both cases, the smartphone has altered the perspectives of my informants regarding the time spent with their respective families.

In that sense, the aforementioned findings are also part of the answer to the main question proposed in this study:

How do the new consumers perceive the alterations in their everyday lives given the changes that have occurred in the last two decades, with regard to the consumption of durable goods?

Based on my informants' statements, I have concluded that respondents perceive their routines in a completely different way than they had in the past decades. Of course, one's perception of one's life changes continuously, but what I was interested in analysing were the effects of the introduction of durable goods in my informants' routines. Therefore, I have looked at those activities that would be directly impacted by the acquisition of durable goods, such as routines of food preparation, household maintenance and cleanliness practices, transportation routines, leisure activities, communication habits and so forth.

I introduced the "before and after" reflection by asking my informants about how they currently perform daily activities, and then by inquiring how they performed them before the acquisition of the objects and appliances involved in their current practices. Then, I asked how they perceive their everyday lives now in comparison to how they were before, and if/how the given thing transformed the way they understand the world.

As a result of those reflections, my informants described that considerable changes have occurred in different aspects of their routines, related to the perception and use of time, desires and aspirations, social roles and empowerment (especially regarding gender related issues) and interpersonal relations, among other things. Some examples of those alterations in perception are presented above in the answer to the next question.

Consumption of public goods was also a subject of this analysis, and the opinions of my informants regarding the services offered in Cabo Frio were conclusively negative. The alterations in the quality of public services directly influence people's lives and choices, according to the good life concept. The recent degradation of public security, which was a special issue highlighted by my group of informants, was mentioned by many as a reason to change old habits and acquire new appliances in order to make the household

environment more appealing for spending more time inside the house than outside on the streets.

Overall, the everyday lives of my informants have drastically changed during the last decades. They recognize that the new practices introduced by acquired appliances or by environmental factors, which were firstly seen as discreet alterations in their routines, have also contributed to changing their perspectives and aspirations regarding life. Therefore, I would like to emphasize the importance of practices in changing people's lives and perspectives on life. As widely discussed, performing practices affects the way people perceive the world, and new practices are introduced to people's lives through consumption. The popularization of consumption among the poor in developing countries is a reality and it has positive and negative outcomes.

The rural Mozambican family's case clearly shows how the introduction of simple objects (a bicycle, in this example) can alter a family's routine and shift its economic status, creating opportunities for an extremely poor family to change their condition – or at least to see the light at the end of the tunnel. In the field, I was able to listen to similar situations that happened to my informants and shifted the ways they live and perceive life.

Accordingly, the most important point of this thesis, and the reason why I chose to write about this subject, is that all those alterations are capable of creating ambitions and dreams, to shift the way one perceives the future and the possibilities it may hold. “This [electric] pot has improved the quality of many people's lives, especially mine”, said Jenifer in her interview; “If I get a bicycle I will be so happy” said Andre from Mozambique (Rosling 2013, 35'05”). The ability to dream, to have a goal to reach, to feel able to have a better life and to give a better life to the next generations is something that consumption is in a way providing to the poor today.

Therefore, the demand for products and subsequently for electricity will keep growing until every household has the “basic kit” that makes everyday life easier. Consequently, the pressure on the environment for resources will rise exponentially. This is a sustainability dilemma, as on the one hand the environment should be conserved, while on the other hand people should have the right to have a “good life”. The key point here

is how to connect people to the things that improve their lives without harming the environment, and this is an interesting research topic to be developed in the future.

In addition, I would like to see future researches on consumption patterns among the segment approached by this thesis and its consequences in improving or worsening peoples' lives in other developing countries, especially in poorer countries where the infrastructure is still less developed than in Brazil. Analysing the role of consumption in a simpler environment and its outcomes would be an interesting study, as well as to analyse how consumption of durable goods relates to economic stability regarding the "strugglers".

Concerning the Brazilian context, although the current economic crisis and political instability may hold back consumption for a while, I would like to follow up the perceptions of Brazilians about dishwashers and how and if it will change over time. Comparing the changing perceptions with the spread of the appliance in Brazilian households and its consequences to the middle class lifestyle as well as to the employability of maids would be an interesting study, for the sake of my curiosity.

To finish, I trust my thesis can be useful to other researchers of consumption, wellbeing and environment and I hope it will contribute to the understanding of consumption among the poor in developing countries. This thesis may help to understand the limitations of consumption in changing peoples' lives if not accompanied by infrastructure and good quality public services. Moreover, it may also shed light on the role of consumption in shifting the practices of the "new consumers" and thus their perceptions, desires and ambitions.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview guide

Family

(Try to understand the household's socio-economic standing; education, occupations, positions, history of the family, size of the family, hierarchies)

1. Family composition and parental relations (members living in the household).

2. Occupations in the household per member

- Jobs additional to official positions
- Try to find the average household income

3. Education

- Years of education per family member
- Type of education: public or private school/university

Household

(Observe: maintenance conditions, type of property)

4. Is the property owned or rented?

5. How long have you been living in this property? Where did you live over the past two decades?

6. How many rooms are in the household?

- Kitchen / Bathroom / toilet / bedroom / living room / laundry room / yard / other

7. How is the space divided among the inhabitants?

Appliances

12. Regarding electric and electronic appliances, who owns the majority of them in the household? Who is responsible for paying for them? Who is responsible for deciding purchasing them?

13. Which and how many electric appliances do you have at home today?

- Washing machine/ dishwasher / fridge / freezer / microwave oven/ electric oven / food processor / mixer /juicer / iron / air conditioner/ fan / TV set / DVD or Blu-ray player / shower / hair blower / hair stylish equipment / hair removal / radio / other

14. Which and how many electronic appliances do you have at home today (total, including all the household members)?

- Desktop PC / Laptop / Printer/ regular cellphone / smartphone / tablet / mp3 player / video game / Digital TV set / Fax / Scanner / other

15. How was this list in 2004? And in 1994?

16. Taking into consideration the resulting list, talk about how and why the changes occurred over time. What are your perceptions of it?

17. Do you plan to acquire more appliances? Which ones? Why and When?

18. Among all the appliances you have acquired in your life, which one do you think have mostly changed your everyday life, for the good or for the bad? Why? In which way has it changed your routine?

Energy

19. Do you receive energy bills?⁴⁵

20. How much do you usually pay for the household energy bill?

⁴⁵ The use of illegal power installations, which steal power from the official grid used to be common in Brazil, especially in neighborhoods with poor infrastructure.

21. Do you notice variations in the price over the different seasons of the year? If yes, why do you think it happens?
22. Are you and your family concerned about the amount of energy spent in the household? What you and your family do in your day-by-day to save energy?
23. When buying a new product, do you attempt to its energy consumption levels?
24. How often do you use your electric appliances? And the electronics?
25. Do you concern about the energy spending of your appliances? Why?
26. Do you remember if the amount paid in energy varied much from the mid 90's until today? Tell me your impressions about what has changed and why.
27. Did the “*Apagão*” alter the way you and your family consume energy? What changed by that time? Do you still keep these practices nowadays?

In addition to this list, I have inquired my informants about their opinions and perceptions of public services offered in Cabo Frio. Health, education, transportation and security were the main topics covered.

Appendix B: Pictures of Cabo Frio

In order to illustrate the town, I present a simple mosaic of pictures I took when I was in the field. It shows some neighbourhoods, the city centre and the beachfront.

